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REGIONAL COOPERATION

Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

At its substantive session of 1996, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1996/41 regarding the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996. The overall concern of both resolutions is the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields.

Both bodies in the above resolutions called for the review of the regional commissions with a view to strengthening and enhancing their effectiveness as action-oriented and policy-oriented bodies. The Economic and Social Council also requested the regional commissions to continue undertaking their own reviews, as called for in General Assembly resolution 50/227, and to report to the Council at its substantive session of 1997.

The present report reviews some of the recent reform efforts undertaken by the regional commissions, provides an assessment of progress achieved and suggests further steps that could be initiated. The report also reviews selective activities implemented during the period between the Council's substantive sessions of 1996 and 1997, including follow-up activities to recent world conferences.

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The resolutions and decisions adopted by the regional commissions during the period under review are contained in the addendum. The summaries of the economic surveys of the five regions have been made available to the Council. The annual reports of the regional commissions contain further background information on the matters dealt with in the present report and its addendum. They are issued as supplements to the Official Records of the Economic and Social Council.

In addition, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Economic and Social Council resolution 1817 (LV), the report of the executive secretaries is contained in the annex.

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	REFORM OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS	1 - 78	4
	A. Economic Commission for Europe	5 - 19	4
	B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	20 - 38	7
	C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	39 - 51	11
	D. Economic Commission for Africa	52 - 65	14
	E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	66 - 78	17
II.	TRENDS AND ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO RECENT GLOBAL CONFERENCES	79 - 216	21
	A. Work of the Commissions	80 - 150	21
	B. Follow-up activities to recent global conferences	151 - 211	36
	C. Interregional cooperation: activities of interest to more than one commission	212 - 216	51
Annex.	REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES		54

I. REFORM OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

1. The debate over adapting the United Nations to the requirements of the twenty-first century instead of those which existed in 1945 is taking place in a broad context. Not only is it part of an effort to enhance the role of the Organization in development but it is also a reflection of the search for greater efficiency and effectiveness against a background of fiscal constraints faced by many Member States.

2. The role of the regional commissions forms part of this broader context; i.e., once the revised mission of the Organization in the economic and social spheres is clarified, one of the many questions Governments will have to ask themselves is which of the proposed functions and specific activities to be developed should be entrusted to the regional commissions, based on their comparative advantages. In addition, part of the ongoing debate includes whether the United Nations should incorporate in its approach to development a regional dimension, and if the response is in the affirmative, how the regional commissions are to interact with other non-United Nations regional organizations.

3. As part of the United Nations, the regional commissions are well placed to facilitate the promotion and implementation, both regionally and, through appropriate back-stopping, at the national level, of global commitments within the United Nations framework. As part of their respective regions, the commissions enable member countries to bring their perspective to global forums, and allow each and every country to participate on an equal footing in the discussions and decision-making process. Further, the commissions offer neutral forums in which policy debates can take place, drawing on multisectoral analysis focused on the specific situations and needs of their respective regions.

4. Ultimately, it will be the member Governments of the commissions that will determine their specific role in a reformed United Nations. Notwithstanding the commonalities in the role of the commissions, it is also evident that each one of them is distinct from the other, based on the specific circumstances that shape its work programme, different priorities, differing institutional realities and varying historical characteristics. For this reason, although all of the commissions have experienced intense efforts to adapt to changing circumstances, the content, scope and intensity of those efforts vary from one commission to another. They do, however, have a common goal: to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in response to delivering the outputs that their members expect of them. The content and scope of those efforts are briefly described below.

A. Economic Commission for Europe

5. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has gone through a reform process aimed at defining its strategic directions, taking into account the many political and institutional changes confronting Europe today. The ECE reform process has been conducted in a comprehensive and transparent manner. The findings of a detailed questionnaire sent to all member countries and intensive

consultations held thereafter have permitted individual member States, the principal subsidiary bodies, the Bureau of the Commission and its secretariat to be fully involved in the reform process. Consultations have led to an in-depth review of the programme of work, at the level of each programme element, as well as to a thorough examination of issues of organizational and institutional nature, such as the Commission's intergovernmental structure, its methods of work, and its relations with other bodies and civil society involvement, including the business community.

6. The outcome of the reform is reflected in the plan of action approved by the Commission in February 1997 and formally adopted, together with a political declaration, at the jubilee session of the Commission in April 1997.[1]

7. At a substantive level, ECE has refocused its activities on strategic areas in which it has recognized expertise and proven advantages, and for which there is widespread support throughout the region. These are all areas that call for a multilateral treatment and serve the objective of economic integration through the development of conventions, norms and standards, and the production of reliable statistical data and in-depth economic analysis concerning the region as a whole. The programme of work has been streamlined accordingly, with a reduction in the number of programme elements from 268 to 105. Similarly, the intergovernmental machinery has been reduced from 14 to 7 principal subsidiary bodies.

8. The refocusing has led to a strengthening of activities in the fields of environment, transport, statistics and trade. The latter area of work has been restructured and renamed "Trade, industry and enterprise development". It takes up some industrial issues formerly covered by the programme on industry and technology, now being discontinued. In the future, those issues will be addressed from a cross-sectoral perspective by being linked to the interrelated fields of enterprise development, trade and investment. This approach corresponds to the new context created by the adherence of the whole region to the market economy system. It also corresponds to changes in government structure at the national level. The work in the field of economic analysis has been reorganized. The Economic Survey of Europe will be further concentrated on the analysis of economic developments and problems in the transition economies, and supported by regularly updated statistical database on those countries.

9. At a managerial and organizational level, two mechanisms have been set up in order to introduce more flexibility in the methods of work: (a) an oversight and adjusting mechanism that will allow existing activities to be terminated and new ones to be initiated in accordance with changing needs and realities; (b) the establishment of a coordinating unit for operational activities, which, within the ECE mandate, will organize demand-driven seminars and workshops on issues of direct interest to specific groups of countries, primarily countries in transition. Furthermore, the intergovernmental structure of ECE has been made more coherent and transparent, thereby simplifying the decision-making processus and increasing the cost-effectiveness of ECE activities. In particular, all principal subsidiary bodies are requested to reduce the length of their annual sessions and to define precise programmes of work for any new related bodies, with a time-frame and "sunset" clauses. Finally, coordination and cooperation with other regional and global organizations will be

strengthened in order to avoid duplication and to develop synergies, building upon complementarities in terms of mandate, membership and issues. To that end, principal subsidiary bodies and their respective bureaux have been invited to conduct a periodic review of the work programme of other international and regional organizations active in the same area; those reviews should lead to an appropriate division of tasks through programme adjustments and to various forms of cooperation, such as joint programmes and activities.

10. With respect to cooperation with other regional and subregional bodies, relations with institutions working in Europe were expanded in 1996 with a twofold objective: (a) to make ECE activities, conventions, norms and standards more widely known and applied; and (b) to promote cooperation and division of labour on the basis of respective assets and proven advantages.

11. Cooperation with organizations that have a similar membership and a complementary mandate has been strengthened; this is mainly the case for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The ECE secretariat has made an additional effort to support the conceptual and programming stage of OSCE economic activities. Substantive contributions have been provided to the OSCE Economic Forum and to seminars dealing with private-sector development and international investments, as well as with sustainable environmental development.

12. ECE cooperation with the Council of Europe is based on a similar type of complementarity, as illustrated by the Conference on Progress of Economic Reform in Central and Eastern Europe, held at Warsaw in May 1996. That event was organized jointly by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and ECE, and the publications of the latter on the analysis of transition served as a basis for discussion during the Conference. The only sector of activities common to ECE and the Council of Europe is environment, where there is a division of labour: the Council addresses issues related to nature conservation and ECE has a comprehensive agenda on other environmental issues.

13. ECE cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in common areas of work takes into account the evolving membership of OECD. The division of tasks is reviewed accordingly and on a regular basis, in particular in the fields of statistics, environment, transport, trade and investment.

14. The European Commission is a major partner institution for ECE. Its active involvement in the reform process is expected to lead to strengthened cooperation in areas of common concern, especially concerning assistance to countries in transition and to norms and standard-setting.

15. ECE relationships with the World Bank take the form of cooperation for the organization of seminars, mainly in the field of foreign investment promotion. The World Bank, directly and through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), also supports a number of ECE projects, particularly in the field of energy efficiency. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) participates in the joint presentation of statistical work programmes within the framework of the ECE Conference of European Statisticians.

16. Cooperation links with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have developed in areas where activities of both organizations are mutually reinforcing. EBRD has provided support for ongoing ECE programmes on energy efficiency, trade, finance, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

17. Cooperation with subregional groupings is also expanding, in particular with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Central European Initiative and the Commonwealth of Independent States. ECE provides its technical expertise to projects initiated by those bodies and a number of projects of common interest are under consideration, particularly in the fields of transport, environment, trade and investment.

18. The private sector is involved in many of the Commission's activities in such areas as trade facilitation, East-West trade and investment promotion, transport regulations, environment and human settlements, the "Environment for Europe" process, industrial cooperation, energy, the activities of the Gas Centre and the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project. The business community actively participates in seminars, round tables, workshops and study tours organized under ECE auspices, which provide opportunities for making business contacts as well as for promoting ECE instruments, such as investment guides, to assist countries in transition. Continuing and expanding the Commission's cooperation with the private sector will require ECE to develop activities that address the concerns of the business community. Future actions to achieve that objective were discussed throughout the ECE restructuring process, and have been stipulated in the plan of action.

19. ECE enjoys broad and fruitful cooperative relations with non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society, particularly academic institutions and professional associations. Non-governmental organizations regularly participate in the Commission's activities by attending its meetings, seminars and workshops. They offer expert opinions and contribute to the decision-making process in their areas of interest.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

20. Within the context of the reform of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) reviewed and restructured its conference structure in 1987[2] and again in 1992;[3] the latter reform effort was comprehensive. The Commission had recognized that the interdependence of the major economic and social development challenges facing Asia and the Pacific argued strongly for an intersectoral, multidisciplinary strategy to meet the needs of the region. It was clear that a pressing need existed for integrated, holistic and comprehensive policy research so that viable options could be presented to Governments for framing their development policies. It was also clear that the credibility of the policy options presented to Governments and the effectiveness of the associated technical assistance projects would depend critically on high-quality multidisciplinary analysis. At the same time, given the secretariat's limited resources - both human and financial - it was considered imperative to concentrate on a limited range of priority concerns so as not to spread the available resources too thinly. All secretariat activities

were therefore re-evaluated in terms of their contribution to a limited range of achievable, coherent and mutually reinforcing objectives.

21. In order to effectively address the regional economic and social development issues associated with the emerging global development paradigm, by resolution 48/2 the Commission, at its forty-eighth session, in 1992, introduced a thematic approach to its conference and programme structure. The Commission revised its conference structure from nine committees to the following: (a) three thematic committees for regional economic cooperation, environment and sustainable development, and poverty alleviation; (b) two technical committees, one for transport and communications, and the other for statistics; and (c) two special bodies, for least developed and landlocked developing countries, and for Pacific island developing countries. The sessions of several of those bodies have been biennialized and streamlined through the adoption of more focused agendas and a reduction in the duration of the sessions. The annual sessions of the Commission have been streamlined by reducing the number of working days from 10 to 7; the number and length of documents for the Commission and its subsidiary bodies were reduced as well.

22. In resolution 48/2, the Commission decided to review its conference structure, including its thematic priorities and subsidiary structure, no later than at its fifty-third session. The review of the conference structure has been part of the continuing reform efforts carried out by the Commission to improve its performance and relevance to the countries of the region. Areas that had been considered in the past included institutional streamlining, priority-setting in the work programme, greater transparency, more effective resource utilization, and measures to enhance the accountability of the Commission. Measures to pre-empt duplication of work with other United Nations bodies active in economic and social development affairs in Asia and the Pacific and to strengthen regional coordination of activities within the United Nations system included the establishment in 1994 of the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific, with a mandate to identify programme areas for inter-agency cooperation. Annual consultative meetings with the heads of the region's major subregional organizations were also initiated in 1994 to strengthen intraregional cooperation.

23. Against this background of continuing reform to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission, the impact of the shift to thematic conference structure was reviewed extensively by a secretariat working group succeeded by a task force (see PMD/CSC/1), the Advisory Committee for Permanent Representatives (see PMD/CSC/2), a group of selected eminent persons (see PMD/CSC/3 and Add.1) with broad multisectoral perspective on the region's economic and social issues and, in February 1997, by an intergovernmental regional preparatory meeting (see E/ESCAP/1048 and Corr.1) which reviewed the outcome of the analyses, in preparation for the review by the Commission. The responses of member countries and associate member countries to the secretariat questionnaire also served as a useful guide.

24. Account was taken of the multifaceted role of the Commission as the only intergovernmental regional forum for the Asian and Pacific region as a whole for the exchange of national economic and social development views and experiences. In addition, the role of the Commission as a regional body for policy-oriented

socio-economic research and analysis and as an executing agency of technical assistance was noted. It was also noted that ESCAP had continued to contribute to the coordination of the work of the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies in the region and to strengthening cooperation among major subregional intergovernmental groupings.

25. It was observed that the thematic approach had enabled the secretariat to undertake more multidisciplinary activities, in consonance with the comparative advantage of ESCAP vis-à-vis the specialized agencies of the United Nations and other agencies that had competence in individual disciplines. The thematic approach had also brought about greater interaction among secretariat personnel, and had fostered a better understanding among staff of the work of other divisions and enhancing interdivisional working linkages. Above all, on a priority theme, such as regional economic cooperation, the secretariat's activities had acquired greater thrust.

26. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that the thematic structure had not brought about very substantial improvements in the Commission's work. Difficulties stemmed from the fact that the division of responsibilities among government ministries in the region, as well as within the ESCAP secretariat, continued to be based mainly on sectoral lines to take full advantage of the thematic approach. That had necessitated a considerable degree of coordination all around, which had not been easy to achieve. The thematic arrangements had also not attracted greater ministerial or high-level participation in the relevant meetings of the Commission. In addition, since the themes were very broad, and covered a wide range of areas, there had sometimes been a blurring of focus, with the result that the secretariat had had to spread its resources too thinly.

27. On balance however, the regional preparatory meeting had viewed the advantages of the thematic approach as outweighing the disadvantages. Considering that a process of evolution was preferable to any radical change, it felt that the right approach would be to consolidate gains, wherever made, and to make the necessary changes in the case of committees and subprogrammes for which some reordering of programme areas or a clearer expression of focus could be of advantage, particularly with respect to themes related to poverty alleviation, and environment and sustainable development. On the other hand, the work of the two sectoral committees, the Committee on Transport and Communications and the Committee on Statistics, was considered satisfactory.

28. In proposing changes to the existing conference structure, the regional preparatory meeting considered it extremely important to take into account current development trends in the region: the imperatives of closer regional and subregional cooperation, rapid urbanization and accelerated infrastructure development were becoming increasingly evident and needed to be addressed adequately. Similarly, it was important that any changes to the conference structure take into account the current budgetary situation of the United Nations. Furthermore, the conference structure should seek to bring about the wider participation of members and associate members in the Commission. It should aim to sharpen the focus of work of the Commission and its subsidiary committees, thereby improving effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of the ESCAP work programme. Within that context, the terms of reference of the

committees should be flexible so as to enable ESCAP to respond to new demands and adjust its priorities in the light of the region's rapidly changing economic and social circumstances. Each committee should identify the tasks to be undertaken during a specified period, indicate the outcomes expected from each task, and set a time-frame for its achievement and monitor its implementation.

29. Conformity between the conference structure and the programme and secretariat structure would be a desirable means of ensuring the effective and efficient functioning of the Commission.

30. As recommended by the regional preparatory meeting, the Commission, at its fifty-third session, in April 1997,[4] decided that its sessions should continue to be held on an annual basis, comprising a senior officials' segment followed by a ministerial segment. The possibility of holding an informal session among the heads of delegations during the ministerial segment of each Commission session to encourage open discussion should be considered.

31. The conference structure should include the following five committees subsidiary to the Commission, with the periodicity of sessions as indicated: (a) Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation, which would be assisted by a steering group (biennial, with the steering group meeting annually); (b) Committee on Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas (annual); (c) Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development (annual); (d) Committee on Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development (annual); and (e) Committee on Statistics (biennial). The duration of the sessions of the committees should be three days.

32. The Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries, as well as the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries, should be retained. The sessions of the special bodies should be held for two days biennially, one each in alternate years, back-to-back with the annual sessions of the Commission.

33. Ministerial meetings (in addition to the annual Commission session) should be restricted to no more than one per year, with effect from 1998. In years when a ministerial conference is held that is regarded as covering issues normally discussed in a corresponding committee or special body, that committee or special body should not be convened. Furthermore, ESCAP should convene regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings for global conferences only as mandated to do so by higher authority, or when such meetings were determined to be absolutely necessary.

34. The number of intergovernmental meetings (other than committee sessions) convened with the prior approval of the Commission should be reduced from the current 15 meetings per year to five meetings. The current maximum number of 100 days per calendar year for such meetings should be reduced to 25 days.

35. The Commission should set clear and realistic priorities that could be continually reassessed and adjusted to meet changing regional demands, especially in view of the resource constraints facing the Organization. Resources should be directed towards clearly identified priority areas.

36. The Commission welcomed the questionnaire circulated to its members and associate members seeking their assessment of the secretariat's resource allocations at the programme activity level for the programme of work for 1996-1997, and requested that the analysis of the responses from Governments should be used for proposing changes to the programme of work for 1998-1999 and as a basis for future programme planning. It also suggested that the publications programme be reviewed with a view to streamlining it.

37. The Commission recognized the important role of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives (ACPR) and other members designated by the Commission that met monthly in assisting the secretariat in discharging its tasks and undertaking the reform exercise. It recommended that ACPR further examine ways to enhance and improve its ability to advise and assist the Executive Secretary in drawing up proposals for the medium-term plan, the programme budget and the work programme priorities and resource allocation that were consistent with the guidelines provided by the Commission, and in monitoring and evaluating the implementation and outcomes of the Commission's programme of work. A review should also be undertaken by ACPR on the possibility of further reducing the number of days of the annual Commission session from the current seven working days.

38. The Commission reaffirmed that the complexity of the development problems faced by the countries in the Asia and Pacific region, in particular the developing countries, increasingly demanded that those problems be tackled in a comprehensive manner through interdisciplinary and intersectoral action, and recognized that the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary provided a historic opportunity for the Commission to bring about wider participation of its members and to sharpen the focus of its work to enable it to respond more effectively to the evolving economic and social needs of the members and associate members within a rapidly evolving global paradigm, and the changing scope of regional cooperation, by utilizing fully the multidisciplinary advantage of the Commission and its increased capability in technical assistance activities.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

39. The conceptual framework for adapting the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to changing circumstances, within the United Nations and in Latin America and the Caribbean, was outlined in a document entitled "Reform of the United Nations and its impact on ECLAC" (see LC/G.1899 (SES.26/4)). Conceived as an issues paper, the document was presented at the twenty-sixth session of the Commission at San José, Costa Rica, at which an extensive debate was held on the matter. It was recognized that some aspects of the United Nations reform are systemic in nature, and in consequence require system-wide definitions. These include the role that the regional commissions are to play in the future within the broader United Nations.

40. On the other hand, there are also a number of areas in which efforts to achieve greater relevance, effectiveness and efficiency can and should be undertaken within the Commission. The above-mentioned document formulated proposals on some of those matters, including a more focused institutional identity and purpose (mission statement), more rigorous priority-setting within

the work programme, streamlining the organizational structure, efficiency measures to enhance productivity, and greater responsibility and accountability in general on the part of staff and management.

41. As a result of the debate held by member Governments on the basis of the secretariat's issues paper, the Commission adopted resolution 553 (XXVI), in which it set forth the third and most far-reaching formal statement in recent times of the Commission on the role and functions of ECLAC (previous resolutions were 520 (XXIV) and 541 (XXV)). This most recent resolution includes an updated mission statement, which defines ECLAC as a centre of excellence charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of development processes geared to the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and the resulting provision of operational services in the fields of specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional and international cooperation and coordination (para. 2). It will be noted that that statement combines operational with normative activities.

42. Further, in the same resolution the Commission decided to establish an ad hoc working group open to all ECLAC member countries, to be headed by the Chairman of the twenty-sixth session of the Commission, which in consultation with the Executive Secretary, is empowered to define priorities for the work programme and recommend to the Commission strategic directions for its future activities, taking into account the development priorities of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as budgetary considerations (para. 7). Thus, a new mechanism has been created through which the secretariat can interact with its member Governments not only in a priority-setting exercise but in discussing strategic directions for the institution.

43. The ad hoc working group met for the first time at Santiago from 29 to 31 July 1996; at that meeting, all the elements of the ECLAC work programme for the biennium 1998-1999 were assigned a relative priority, and were thoroughly analysed.[5] The working group amply demonstrated its usefulness as a forum in which the secretariat and the Governments of the member countries can undertake an in-depth examination of the programme of work. The fact that the ECLAC programme of work has been debated in much greater detail than ever before is evidence of a new approach in keeping with the main aims of the effort to reform the United Nations.

44. The discussions also highlighted the difficulty of structuring a programme of work that fully reflects the desires and objectives of each of the member countries. A number of dilemmas surfaced, including the following: finding the dividing line between a concentration on high-impact activities and the necessity of forming an institutional view regarding the wide spectrum of major development issues confronting the Latin American and Caribbean countries; maintaining a clear balance between the allocation of resources to each of the subprogrammes and the possibility of concentrating on a smaller number of subprogrammes; striking an adequate balance between analytical and operational activities; distributing activities between the Commission's headquarters at Santiago and its subregional headquarters; and linking funding drawn from budgetary resources with funding from extrabudgetary resources.

45. Above all, the first meeting of the ad hoc working group was perceived as the beginning of a process, rather than as a self-contained exercise. Accordingly, and as part of that process, the New York-based delegations of ECLAC member countries were informed of the proceedings of the ad hoc working group's first meeting in a gathering held at United Nations Headquarters on 25 October 1996 (see LC/G.1945); subsequently, the Economic and Social Council was informed of all the proceedings (see LC/G.1950). The second meeting of the ad hoc working group has been scheduled to meet in New York on 5 and 6 June 1997 to continue its deliberations on ECLAC reform.

46. As part of a new system-wide management scheme being devised by the ECLAC Department of Administration and Management to enhance the use of incentives and sanctions in the decision-making process regarding the allocation of human and financial resources, ECLAC has formulated a proposal for a pilot project. The gist of the scheme consists in giving programme supervisors greater authority and flexibility to mobilize the human and financial resources at their disposal so that functions may be carried out in the most effective and efficient manner, and thus to render a stricter accounting in terms of the content, volume and quality of outputs as well as overall performance (see LC/R.1704).

47. The decision to seek new modalities of management is consistent with the Commission's efforts during the past decade to adapt to changing circumstances, both within Latin America and the Caribbean and within the United Nations. Determined efforts have been undertaken in numerous fields, including strategic planning, institutional development (especially in the areas of personnel management and training), internal reorganization, programming, budgeting and priority-setting (see LC/G.1899). The ultimate goal, in substantive terms, is to remain relevant to the Latin American and Caribbean development experience and to obtain the most value for any given amount of financial resources placed at the organization's disposal. This new style of management is the centrepiece of the ECLAC effort to maintain and possibly enhance the volume and the quality of its outputs in the face of what seems to be a dwindling financial base.

48. Further, an efficiency programme has been designed, part of which is already being implemented.[6] This initiative seeks to enhance the productivity of staff through improved procedures, better distribution of responsibilities in staff assignments, streamlining and technological innovations. Specific projects involve the introduction of modern computing and telecommunications technologies to access and disseminate information, produce documents and service meetings, as well as to improve the administrative support required to ensure an efficient discharge of the substantive functions of the secretariat. It also involves outsourcing some activities heretofore undertaken by in-house staff.

49. ECLAC has a long history of cooperation with other regional and multilateral organizations. Recently, there have been three noteworthy developments that enhance that trend. First, on 20 April 1996, a formal agreement was signed between the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), establishing a specific framework for future cooperation between the two institutions. Second, a similar arrangement, albeit less formal and much less comprehensive, has been undertaken between ECLAC and IMF.[7] Finally, ECLAC has an ongoing cooperative work

programme with the Organization of American States (OAS) and IDB for servicing several intergovernmental working groups that are dedicated to exploring paths that could lead towards the creation of a hemisphere-wide free trade area.

50. Similar efforts have been adopted to enhance a close working relationship with other United Nations organizations, particularly the regional bureau of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In line with the guidelines set down by the Administrator of UNDP, the regional commissions in general and ECLAC in particular are developing certain key (flagship) joint activities. In addition, considerable efforts have recently been made to diversify the joint activities undertaken by ECLAC and the UNDP regional bureau regarding projects with a regional dimension. Although those steps certainly move in the right direction, they appear to be insufficient, since there still appears to be some duplication and overlapping in the activities that ECLAC and UNDP carry out at the regional level in Latin America and the Caribbean. Additional efforts will be undertaken in coming months to address that matter.

51. A programme budget proposal for the 1998-1999 biennium has been prepared in accordance with the changing realities and challenges that ECLAC will face in the broader context of United Nations reform and the changing environment in Latin America and the Caribbean. The submission made at the end of December 1996 by the secretariat is further consistent with ECLAC's new medium-term plan.

D. Economic Commission for Africa

52. The reforms initiated since mid-1995 to renew the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) are well advanced and have been wide-ranging. They have encompassed three levels of institutional reforms, namely programmes and priority setting; organizational restructuring; and managerial reforms. The new programme orientation for and the priorities of the Commission were articulated in a document entitled "Serving Africa better: strategic directions for the Economic Commission for Africa" (see E/ECA/CM.22/2).

53. The new programme structure is characterized by congruence between organizational and programmatic structures, reduction in the number of subprogrammes, and clustering closely related activities under a single subprogramme to foster synergy and achieve greater efficiency and impact in the delivery of services. The number of subprogrammes have been reduced from nine to five with a view to promoting greater focus through a clearer definition of goals, as well as the setting of time-limited objectives.

54. The five new subprogrammes are facilitating economic and social policy analysis; enhancing food security and sustainable development; strengthening development management; harnessing information for development; and promoting regional cooperation and integration. Two cross-cutting issues, promoting women in development and capacity-building, will underpin those subprogrammes. For programming purposes, the activities of the African Centre for Women - the ECA organizational unit responsible for advancement of women - are reflected in the subprogramme on facilitating economic and social policy analysis.

55. Extensive consultations were held on the new strategic directions of the Commission with various stakeholders, including high-level African experts drawn from African Governments, regional and subregional organizations, the private sector and civil society, the Commission's principal partners (representatives of United Nations agencies, bilateral donors and private international foundations), and African Governments, culminating in their endorsement by the Conference of African Ministers for Economic and Social Development and Planning at its annual session in May 1996.[8]

56. The endorsement of the strategic directions by the ECA conference, in turn, provided the impetus for the restructuring of the secretariat of the Commission which is now being completed. Complementing the programme and organizational reforms were a series of managerial reforms, focusing on improvement of the programme planning and budgeting systems, human resources management and communications strategy, as well as information technology systems and enhancing the staff technical capacity, through a comprehensive training programme that will be implemented incrementally.

57. There is another level of reform required to complete this phase of renewal of the Commission: the intergovernmental machinery. This includes the principal legislative organ and subsidiary bodies that define the policy priorities and provide guidance on the work of the Commission. Proposals for streamlining the intergovernmental machinery of the Commission have been submitted to the Conference of Ministers in May 1997 (see E/ECA/CM.23/4). The main objectives will be to reduce the number of intergovernmental subsidiary bodies and the frequency of their meetings, eliminate overlap of bodies dealing with related sectoral issues by organizing the subsidiary bodies on a thematic approach, and promote greater coherence and coordination with the intergovernmental machinery of other regional organizations.

58. The various levels of reform have not only resulted in the sharpening of the focus of work of the Commission but have also led to establishing new modalities for delivering programmes with greater impact and increased efficiency. Significant changes and improvements in ECA modalities of work include fewer and improved reports; reduction in the number of meetings; and new arrangements for networking so that ECA combines its in-house expertise with outside talents in the continent to creatively address policy problems in Africa. To enhance the quality of its documents, ECA will improve content by more rigorous technical editing and peer review. A particularly important measure for enhancing the impact of the work of the Commission is the decentralization of staff and activities to the subregional level: about 25 per cent of all ECA staff will be deployed to the five multinational programming and operational centres, now to be redesignated subregional development centres.

59. The decentralization of activities to the Commission's subregional development centres - located in the five subregions of the continent - and the increase in the number of staff in those centres will enable ECA to provide effective technical support to intergovernmental organizations at the subregional level and the regional economic communities established to spearhead economic integration. An important component in supporting subregional cooperation is the rationalization and harmonization of the multiplicity of

subregional organizations - an effort that member States have repeatedly emphasized. To realize that goal, ECA is collaborating with other regional organizations, especially the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in conducting a study on the issue.

60. Various efficiency measures have been taken. Greater use of modern technology will increase the speed of several administrative processes that were hitherto manually operated, and will reduce the number of staff assigned to such functions. To offset the loss of those positions, there will be greater reliance on outsourcing of services, which will have several advantages, including flexibility in implementation of the work programme, the availability of a diverse range of expertise that may not be available in the secretariat but which is required in the short term, and the strengthening of professional interactions between outside experts and in-house specialists, reinforcing a culture of excellence.

61. Further flexibility in programme delivery will come from renewed efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources. A prospectus detailing a range of project proposals for strengthening Africa's development in 1997-1999 has been prepared. Entitled "Forging partnership for Africa's development", the document details specific activities in which ECA is seeking various forms of collaboration with partners, including bilateral donors and multilateral institutions. The nature of partnership being sought varies with each proposal: in some, collaboration will take the form of financial support; in others, it will entail exchange of staff; and in others, it will involve providing joint research and advisory services to member States on a variety of policy issues.

62. ECA reform has been guided by three principles: excellence, cost-effectiveness and enhanced partnerships. The last principle reflects the recognition that ECA could be even a greater facilitator for Africa's development, if it worked closely with other key actors in Africa. Accordingly, African regional organizations, United Nations agencies and other multilateral and bilateral donors have been actively involved in ECA reform. For example, OAU and the African Development Bank, as well as various subregional economic communities, were invited to and participated in the consultative meetings on the new strategic directions for ECA in January 1996. Similarly, a partners meeting of bilateral donors and multilateral institutions was convened in April 1996 to discuss the new strategic directions.

63. Consequently, ECA reform measures are not only well known to but are deeply appreciated by ECA partners, who view the new programme orientation as providing a strong basis for collaboration. To the degree that those measures have sharpened the focus of the work programme of the Commission, it has enabled ECA to reposition itself for strong collaboration with subregional and regional organizations in Africa, as well as with other entities in the United Nations system. That effort has been productive. For example, the World Bank has offered to collaborate with ECA in the areas of poverty monitoring, assessment and analyses, and to share its comprehensive household survey database. More significantly, it has pledged a financial contribution of $1 million to the ECA Leadership Fund for Women, of which it has paid about $435,000. Other organizations of the United Nations system have indicated an interest in

undertaking joint advocacy and advisory services with ECA in support of the development efforts of member States.

64. The convergence between the new ECA strategic directions for 1997-2001 and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa fifth intercountry programme for 1997-2001 invites strong partnership. One area of growing opportunity for joint action is in assisting member States to formulate and implement country strategy notes in Africa. ECA also expects to collaborate with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to integrate and bring to the forefront of regional and national planning the nexus of food security, population and the environment. ECA plans to collaborate with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the collection and analysis of socio-economic data as a tool for monitoring poverty, in particular as it pertains to the socio-economic situation of African children, and to assist in the publication of the Annual Report on the State of Africa's Children. ECA will collaborate closely with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to assist African countries in developing and adopting policies to increase regional and external trade, with emphasis on viable strategies for the diversification of exports products and markets.

65. Various bilateral donors, including private foundations, have made substantial pledges of financial assistance to ECA programmes. The Governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea are providing financial support for programmes in the area of trade and investment; for example, both made financial contributions to the International Conference on Reviving Private Investment in Africa, held in June 1996. The United States of America has renewed extrabudgetary financial support for strengthening ECA capacity, as has the Government of the Netherlands in area of advancement of women and communications strategy. The Carnegie Corporation has pledged financial support for ECA work in the area of science and technology and information technology.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

66. Of all the world's regions, Western Asia is perhaps the most compact and well defined. Yet its legacy of fragmentation, wars and internal strifes for the past 40 years has constrained the region from fully utilizing its existing resources. Despite its homogeneity, the region lacks cohesive economic and commercial ties. Notwithstanding its cultural and political specificity, economic cooperation in Western Asia is something that must be created and not simply managed. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) offers an ideal regional forum for the discussion of issues - such as trade, capital and labour flows, energy, water, transport and environment - that transcend language and culture.

67. The first response of ESCWA to the need for reform came in 1992. It convened an intergovernmental meeting at Cairo on 8 and 9 January 1992 to review the 1992-1997 medium-term plan in the light of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade. The meeting reviewed the role of ESCWA as a regional think tank and centre of excellence, combining

the theoretical and analytical with the practical and operational. Furthermore, in the report of the meeting (see ESCWA/16/10, annex), ESCWA member States emphasized important issues that ESCWA should address in its revised 1992-1997 medium-term plan. At its sixteenth session, ESCWA reiterated its central role in coordinating and undertaking activities for the development of the member States of the region, and in its resolution 191 (XVI), authorized the Executive Secretary to reorganize the secretariat of the Commission in consultation with the Secretary-General to enhance the effectiveness of its activities.

68. In follow-up, the Secretary-General requested the Office of Inspections and Investigations of the United Nations Secretariat, the predecessor of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), to send a mission to the regional commission. In its report of 16 November 1993 on the programme and administrative practices of the ESCWA secretariat, the mission team concluded that there was no doubt that ESCWA could produce work of real relevance to the region, and recent political events in the region made it even more necessary for ESCWA to be at the forefront of development efforts (see A/49/891, para. 6). The mission recommended a fundamental reappraisal and restructuring of the work programme of ESCWA, emphasizing the importance of replacing the sectoral structure with a thematic structure that would facilitate an interdisciplinary approach in addressing the region's problems, to be followed by a consequential reorganization of the secretariat. In its review of compliance by ESCWA with the above recommendation, OIOS stated that the Commission had completed the restructuring exercise and that no further action was necessary (see A/49/891, para. 11).

69. Nevertheless, ESCWA has continued the process of reform, which has included consultations with the staff of the Secretariat at all levels, with experts (see E/ESCWA/17/9/Rev.1, annex; and E/ESCWA/19/5, annex), and with member States at the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth sessions of the Commission, and at the biannual meetings of the Advisory Committee of Representatives of Member States. Three main priority areas have been identified: the management of natural resources and environment; improvement of the quality of life of the people of the region; and the creation of an environment conducive to economic cooperation. However, the new realities of the globalized economy, compounded by political instability, internal strife and military conflicts within the region, have had a direct impact on the three priority areas mentioned above. Those considerations were reflected in the revised medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, and in the revised programme of work and priorities for the 1994-1995 and 1996-1997 bienniums. Further priority-setting was carried out for the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and the 1998-1999 programme budget, which will be reviewed by the Commission at its nineteenth session, in May 1997.

70. The reform process has entailed a sharpened focus of the ESCWA programme of work, with a reduction from 15 sectoral subprogrammes to 5 thematic subprogrammes and the adoption of multidisciplinary activities as a modality for implementation. The five subprogrammes in the 1998-1999 programme of work are management of natural resources and environment; improvement of the quality of life; economic development and global changes; coordination of policies and harmonization of norms and regulations for sectoral development; and development coordination and harmonization of statistics and information. In both the

proposed plan and budget, the setting of standards, norms and legislative instruments is the overriding theme of most of the activities. Moreover, the total number of activities/outputs has been reduced from 265 in the 1994-1995 programme of work to 158 in the proposed 1998-1999 programme budget, resulting in a 40 per cent reduction in the number of ESCWA activities/outputs.

71. It is also deemed important that ESCWA expand the scope of its activities in areas critical to the development of the region and not covered by other bodies and agencies in the United Nations system. Selected activities falling under the domain of other United Nations bodies will be undertaken only if they are important to the region and require the multidisciplinary approach of ESCWA and its regional perspective. The Commission, therefore, has expanded the scope of its activities in the areas of water, energy and transport, as well as human development, gender and statistics, especially within the context of an integrated approach to following up world conferences. At the same time, ESCWA has reduced its activities in agriculture from 52 to 13 and in industry from 54 to 11 in the 1994-1995 and 1998-1999 programmes of work, resulting in an approximately 75 per cent reduction in the number of activities/outputs in those two areas, which has had direct implications for the structure of ESCWA as well. The new organizational structure (see ST/SGB/Organization, Section: ESCWA/Rev.1 of 6 October 1994) has reduced the previous seven substantive divisions to five, with consolidation of three divisions (agriculture, industry and transport) into one multisectoral division, the Sectoral Issues and Policies Division.

72. In order to ascertain the validity of its reform process, ESCWA convened a meeting of eminent persons (see E/ESCWA/19/5, annex) in the region in 1996 to review the prevailing conditions in the region and identify the challenges confronting it. The eminent persons endorsed the new priorities of ESCWA, which are reflected in its proposed medium-term plan for the period 1997-2001, and the programme budget for the 1998-1999 biennium.

73. The reform also dealt with the need to strengthen the consultations between ESCWA substantive staff and government officials dealing with the same area of competence. Although taking into consideration the trend to reduce and rationalize the number of subsidiary intergovernmental bodies, member States emphasized the need to participate in programme identification and monitoring of programme implementation, and to coordinate selected activities among themselves and within the regional context. Accordingly, four committees, to meet biennially to review priority areas - in statistics, social development, water and energy - were established.[9] The first three were scheduled to meet in early 1997, while the Committee on Energy will meet in September 1997.

74. A secretariat-initiated efficiency review was also undertaken during 1996. This review concentrated on the area of administration and support services, and resulted in recommendations to increase the efficiency of administrative processes, bring about cost savings, enhance office technology, achieve a better balance between substantive and administrative support staff, and establish common services with United Nations agencies at ESCWA headquarters at Beirut. Their implementations are under way (see A/51/829).

75. The reform also gave special attention to the development of staff skills, as well as to the recruitment of the expertise necessary to complement the

skills already available at ESCWA. It is important to note that the chronic vacancy rate problem at ESCWA, which reached 34 per cent in early 1996 due to the freeze imposed on recruitment, will decrease to 16 per cent by June 1997.

76. The reform process has revealed the need for improved coordination of the activities of the United Nations system at the regional level. Beyond strengthening the long-standing bilateral relations that exist between ESCWA and the various United Nations departments, funds and programmes and specialized agencies, ESCWA, acting as the coordinator of social and economic development at the regional level, has also worked to establish what is proving to be an effective mechanism for regional coordination. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group was established in April 1995,[10] and so far has met five times. Its work includes the exchange of information on priority issues for the United Nations and the ESCWA member States, and adopting a complimentary approach in selected activities. The Group is also in the process of reviewing a joint programme of action for follow-up to world conferences, which will be submitted to UNDP as a flagship project. More recently, the World Bank requested ESCWA to execute a regional project on international comparative pricing. The Bank also invited ESCWA to participate as one of the convenors of the first meeting of the Mediterranean Development Forum on the theme "Knowledge and skills for development in the information age", to be held at Marrakech, Morocco, from 12 to 17 May 1997.

77. More intensive contacts have also been established with various regional organizations, with agreements being signed with the League of Arab States and some of its specialized organizations, as well as with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab Planning Institute. ESCWA also receives extrabudgetary resources from the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. ESCWA is being progressively called upon, in particular by the League of Arab States, to act as a partner in joint projects and to provide substantive inputs and technical support to activities undertaken by other regional organizations.

78. The reform process has also had an impact on the relationship of ESCWA with the public at large, a dimension that has been neglected in the past. More efforts are being directed to non-governmental organizations, the private sector, universities, research institutions and the media. The ESCWA 1995 report, a biannual publication, has been issued for the first time, seeking to inform the general public rather than those already knowledgeable about and familiar with the United Nations.

II. TRENDS AND ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO RECENT GLOBAL CONFERENCES

79. As the regional expression of United Nations activities in the economic and social sectors, the regional commissions share certain commonalities. They remain the only permanent intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations system which comprise all countries of their respective regions, and therefore provide a comprehensive framework for region-wide cooperation. They are also the only forum in which all countries of the region can participate on an equal footing. As an integral part of their respective regions, each represents a unique regional character in complying with the collective wishes of its member States, often reflecting regional specificity in the activities being undertaken. As part of the United Nations, they also serve as funnel points through which international cooperation is directed at the regional level - a role most recently mandated for them in the various programmes of action for follow-up to the world conferences. Alternatively, achievements at the regional level can be extended to another region, and can serve as building blocks towards the United Nations central role of promoting development and international cooperation.

A. Work of the commissions

1. Economic Commission for Europe

80. For each area of its work - environment, transport, statistics, trade, industry and enterprise development, economic analysis, energy, timber, human settlements - major ECE activities, as outlined below, reflect specificity both in terms of responding to the needs of the countries of the region and being complementary and not duplicating the work of other regional organizations.

81. The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy plays a strategic role in preparing and following up the ministerial conference "Environment for Europe", which takes place every three years. Following the third ministerial conference (Sofia, October 1995), it has initiated a number of activities, in particular the preparation of: (a) a draft convention on access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making; (b) a proposal for a European strategy to phase out leaded petrol; (c) a White Paper on energy conservation, as well as guidelines for improving energy efficiency, both at the national level and through international cooperation. In preparation for the next ministerial conference (June 1998, Arhus, Denmark), the Committee has established an ad hoc preparatory working group of senior officials, which will facilitate the coordination of the work of the regional organizations involved in the Environment for Europe process. The Environmental Performance Review Programme has been extended, with a clear division of labour with OECD in terms of countries being reviewed. The countries for which environmental performance will be reviewed in 1997-1998 have been identified.

82. The ratification of or accession to ECE environmental conventions and the preparation of new legal instruments have been reviewed. Negotiations have started on three new protocols related to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution on (a) nitrogen oxides and related substances;

(b) heavy metals; and (c) persistent organic pollutants. The ongoing ECE work on the latter will provide a substantive contribution for global action to be taken by UNEP, in cooperation with WHO.

83. The Inland Transport Committee and its subsidiary bodies continue to be active in monitoring and developing legal instruments. A first package of proposals for amendment to the TIR Convention has been prepared. Progress has been made towards the development of a new global agreement on vehicle regulations, which would become parallel to the amended 1958 agreement, and would allow worldwide harmonization of the regulatory requirements for wheeled vehicles, as well as their equipment and parts. A new legal instrument concerning combined transport on inland waterways and coastal shipping lines has been adopted. Work has begun on the draft text of the European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways.

84. The Preparatory Committee for the ECE Regional Conference on Transport and Environment, to be held at Vienna in November 1997, is preparing a declaration, a joint programme of action and a legal instrument on periodic technical inspection of motor vehicles and amendments to the 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Traffic so as to introduce strict environmental standards for heavy commercial vehicles used in international transport. ECE remains the only regional institution developing normative work covering Europe as a whole and North America, and a growing number of its legal instruments are taken up at the global level within the United Nations framework.

85. The Conference of European Statisticians has made further progress in coordinating international statistical work performed by the various international organizations active in the ECE region. A large part of its 1996 plenary session was devoted to the review of the integrated presentation of planned future international statistical work. The Conference decided to further streamline its work by focusing greater attention on four to six programme elements indicated by member States as warranting in-depth review.

86. Furthermore, in any programme element in which several international organizations are actively working, the Bureau of the Conference agreed on the necessity to request one agency to serve as the Rapporteur for the Conference. For example, ECE and the Statistical Office of the European Community (Eurostat) are rapporteurs for about a dozen programme elements each, OECD for about eight, the International Labour Organization (ILO), IMF, UNESCO, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and WTO for several others.

87. The former Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures has been transformed into the Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport. The creation of the Centre will now allow full participation of non-ECE member countries and international organizations. In particular, it will reinforce and build upon the cooperative relationships that already exist in this area between ECE and such bodies as the European Union, WTO, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), UNCTAD and the other regional commissions.

88. In the field of trade and investment promotion, the Working Party on International Contract Practices in Industry has issued guidelines on the creation of viable real estate markets in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Under its auspices, an expert group has been established to prepare guidelines for promoting private investment infrastructure projects. The Working Party is also developing work on guidelines on best investment practices, which are targeted to policy makers in economies in transition.

89. A forum on the prospects for promoting foreign direct investment in transition economies will be held at Geneva in June 1997, with the substantive involvement of the World Bank and other international organizations, as well as the private sector.

90. In the field of agricultural standards, cooperation with the FAO Codex Alimentarius Commission has been intensified, and is being maintained with the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, which publishes explanatory brochures based on ECE standards.

91. The Economic Survey of Europe and the Economic Bulletin for Europe continue to give particular emphasis to current economic developments and policy issues in the transition economies of Eastern Europe and the countries of the former USSR. The 1996 edition of the Bulletin included an extended review of the issues surrounding the enlargement of the European Union to the transition countries, as well as a study of the re-emergence of trade among the East European economies. The Survey for 1996-1997 pays special attention to issues of transition in Central Asia, as well as to the difficulties of transition in South-East Europe.

92. Research into population issues has continued to focus on fertility, family and reproductive health, international migration and population ageing. Most of the standard data sets prepared for countries that conducted fertility and family surveys have been archived at ECE. Arrangements for comparative research have been agreed upon by countries participating in the project. A volume on international migration in Eastern Europe and CIS countries has been published. The work on population ageing focused on the finalization of standard data sets of elderly persons for 14 countries. A plan for preparing country monographs based on those data has been agreed upon by participating countries. That work was carried out with the financial assistance of and in collaboration with UNFPA and the United States National Institute on Ageing.

93. The Committee on Energy has streamlined its programme of work as requested by the Commission. In the field of norms and standards, a United Nations framework classification for solid fuels and mineral commodities has been developed under the auspices of the Working Party on Coal, and it is to be translated into five languages for worldwide use. A trilingual glossary on natural gas resources was developed and published under the auspices of the Working Party on Gas.

94. Concerning extrabudgetary activities, companies, institutions and Governments have continued to provide strong support to the Gas Centre through financial contributions, secondment of experts and in-kind contributions. Two

projects developed under the auspices of Energy Efficiency 2000 have been approved by GEF. New financing has been secured with the World Bank for other projects and initiatives in that field.

95. Activities in the fields of steel, chemical industry, engineering industries and automation have continued, with the support of the private sector; they focus on data collection and analysis of market prospects, restructuring policies in economies in transition, and the environmental aspects of industrial activities.

96. In the field of science and technology, ECE continues to maintain an inventory of existing safety guidelines in biotechnology, and acting as depository, now has national submissions from 34 member Governments and three international organizations.

97. The Timber Committee has confirmed its role as the focal point for collecting, improving and analysing information on the sustainable management of the temperate and boreal forests. In 1996, it reviewed the long-term outlook for the forest and timber sector, and received the mandate to collect data on quantitative indicators of sustainable forest management for the pan-European ministerial process on the protection of forests in Europe. It maintains its close partnership with the FAO European Forestry Commission, with which it has an integrated work programme.

98. The Committee on Human Settlements has streamlined and refocused its work on a limited number of priority issues, namely housing reform, land administration, urban renewal and sustainable human settlements development. The ECE programme focuses on practical strategies, based on best practices and case studies, and on disseminating related information.

99. Technical assistance activities in the above nine areas of work take the form of workshops, seminars and advisory services, and a selected number of projects, as well as assistance in national and subregional capacity-building. They mainly aim at supporting the integration of the countries in transition into the European and global economy, and at facilitating the re-establishment of economic relationships among war-torn countries. For example, ECE is providing technical assistance in the field of border crossing, trade relations, transport and the environment to countries participating in the South-East Cooperative Initiative. Technical assistance activities are demand-driven, and the increasing number of requests from countries in transition reflect both the need for and the usefulness of that aspect of ECE work. As part of those activities, an average of 40 workshops are organized every year. The assistance provided draws on the knowledge base and experience that ECE has accumulated through its regular activities in the fields of conventions, norms, standards, policy guidelines, statistics and economic analysis.

2. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

100. Developing countries in the ESCAP region as a group have been able to enhance their integration with the international economy and forge closer regional linkages in terms of trade and financial flows, including foreign

direct investment. However, that achievement has not been equally shared by all the countries. Variations in the level and speed of integration have been partly influenced by several variables related to macroeconomics and social development. The ESCAP secretariat has been mindful of that discrepancy in the region's growth and development pattern, and has been making concerted efforts to encourage the sharing of experiences between the region's more dynamic and less developed countries.

101. In the area of macroeconomic reform and policy management, for example, ESCAP has placed special emphasis on assisting the economies in transition and the least developed and landlocked and Pacific island countries in their development efforts. Technical assistance and advisory services have been provided to conduct national workshops on macroeconomic reform in the transitional economies of Central Asia; to mobilize private-sector financial resources for infrastructure development in Indochina and to enhance cooperation in trade and investment between Pacific island countries and economies of East and South-East Asia.

102. The focus of ESCAP efforts in spreading the development momentum has been on fostering intraregional cooperation in various fields. ESCAP, for example, took the initiative in convening the first consultative meeting among executive heads of subregional organizations in February 1994, which included the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the South Pacific Forum. A second consultative meeting was hosted by the ASEAN secretariat at Jakarta in January 1995. The third consultative meeting, to be hosted by the ECO secretariat at Teheran in May 1997, will discuss the following subjects/areas: (a) a framework for cooperation among subregional organizations in Asia and the Pacific; (b) the promotion of trade and investment cooperation between ASEAN and ECO: a case study; (c) human resources development: measures and modalities for ESCAP and subregional organizations to cooperate in implementing activities of common interest in order to promote regional cooperation, a follow-up to the meeting of eminent persons on human resources development organized by ESCAP in 1994; (d) transport and communications: possibilities and modalities for promoting intraregional cooperation; and (e) poverty alleviation: exchanges of experience among subregional organizations and ESCAP on the basis of an analytical compendium of activities relating to poverty alleviation implemented by ESCAP and the subregional organizations in the Asian and Pacific region. ESCAP has also facilitated meetings on economic cooperation in North-East Asia, bringing together senior officials from Mongolia, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation to discuss issues ranging from private-sector involvement to environmental protection and management.

103. The Ministerial Conference on Infrastructure, convened by ESCAP at New Delhi in October 1996, adopted the New Delhi Declaration on Infrastructure Development in Asia and the Pacific, which launched the Asia Infrastructure Development Alliance, a tripartite arrangement including the private sector, Governments and ESCAP, and contained a list of operational activities and projects for phase I (1997-2001) of the regional action programme. A joint ESCAP-Japan symposium on Asian highway development, held in November 1996 in Tokyo, provided a discussion forum for improving the road network and for

improving international cooperation in the area. ESCAP is also vigorously promoting accession by member countries to international land transport facilitation conventions. Two subregional seminars for countries of North-East Asia and the greater Mekong subregion were held in 1996. Two other subregional seminars for countries belonging to SAARC and ASEAN are planned during 1997-1998.

104. A subregional seminar on key issues in the implementation of economic reform policies in the Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation was held at Almaty, Kazakstan, in September 1996. The seminar was devoted to three topics: the inter-enterprises arrears problem; the revitalization of economic cooperation links among the countries of Central Asia and the Russian Federation; and progress, problems and future directions of banking reforms. The seminar formulated specific recommendations in those three areas for consideration by policy makers in the countries concerned.

105. ESCAP organized an expert group meeting on enhancing cooperation in trade and investment between Pacific island countries and economies of East and South-East Asia at Port Vila, Vanuatu, in July 1996. The meeting formulated a number of policy recommendations for implementation by national Governments of Pacific island countries and regional agencies in order to forge closer linkages between the Pacific subregion and countries in East and South-East Asia. A seminar on trade policy issues for Papua New Guinea was held at Port Moresby in October 1996 to sensitize policy makers to recent developments in the international trade environment following the completion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, and to consider the implications of those developments for Papua New Guinea.

106. ESCAP has continued its cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the development of the greater Mekong subregion, as well as in such areas as energy and the environment. The Bank participated in and contributed to a workshop, held at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in September 1996, for enhancing macroeconomic reforms and fostering regional economic cooperation among the economies in transition in Indochina, based on the experiences of the ASEAN countries.

107. ESCAP is now preparing for the meeting of ministers of industry and technology scheduled for November 1997. That meeting is expected to consider: (a) industrial and technological restructuring and development for promotion and improvement of industrial complementarities and to achieve competitiveness in the light of new arrangements at the global and regional levels; (b) promoting industrial investment-technology transfer-growth nexus towards greater regionalization and complementation of manufacturing production, and technology upgrading; (c) privatization and private-sector development in promoting industrial and technological development; (d) integrating least developed countries, Pacific island economies and the economies in transition: basic issues and concerns; and (e) financial, human and technical resources in skills development, infrastructure development, and the adaptation of new and emerging technologies: new directions and opportunities.

108. To meet the need for an integrated and effective approach to development at the regional level, the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific

(RICAP) was established in 1994 under the chairmanship of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. The fifth session of RICAP was held at Bangkok in January 1997. That meeting reviewed activities of the various subcommittees established under the aegis of RICAP and the strategies being pursued by them for 1997.

109. Within the framework of RICAP, ESCAP has sought to strengthen cooperation with its development partners, notably UNDP. Discussions have also been held with resident coordinators in selected countries of the region on ways and means of strengthening the linkages between activities at the regional and country levels. With regard to the Bretton Woods institutions, efforts at closer cooperation have yet to yield tangible results. One possible means for encouraging closer collaboration with them could be to urge that missions to countries in the region on macro-policy analysis or sector analysis be jointly undertaken by the Bretton Woods institutions and ESCAP.

110. ESCAP has maintained its role as provider of technical assistance to its member countries, despite decreasing resources being allocated from UNDP. Donor countries, both regional and non-regional, as well as developed and developing countries, have continued their support indicating their assessment of the effectiveness of ESCAP in the use of their resources, in view of ESCAP's comparative advantage. More of that assistance has been directed to the least developed countries and to the economies in transition.

111. ESCAP has also continued and strengthened its efforts to reach out to other segments of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the business community, with a view to involving them more closely in the Commission's activities. For example, ESCAP has been promoting public-private sector partnership through establishment of a private sector advisory group under the Forum for the Comprehensive Development of Indochina. The objectives of the Forum, established at the initiative of the Government of Japan, are to promote voluntary coordination of official development assistance (ODA) activities through information exchange and subregional approach in such sectors as infrastructure development, human resources development and private-sector activities, including trade and investment.

112. Under the private sector advisory group, ESCAP has initiated the networking of the chambers of commerce and industry (CCIs) of the greater Mekong subregion, which consists of the three countries of Indochina, as well as Myanmar, Thailand and the Yunnan Province of China. Recognizing that most CCIs in the subregion are in the nascent stages of their establishment and lack the resources, experience and expertise to play an effective role, ESCAP initiated the networking programme to build institutional capacities of CCIs so that they could serve as intermediaries between the Government and the private sector in trade and investment activities. ESCAP has also been actively promoting the networking of trade-related research institutions in Asia and the Pacific, and has organized a number of national seminars to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas among the researchers, policy makers and business communities.

113. A regional meeting to mark the mid-point of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, is scheduled to be held at Seoul in September 1997.

That meeting will be preceded by a Non-Governmental Organizations Forum to articulate the views of non-governmental organizations on disability-related concerns. ESCAP has also been making efforts to promote the North-East Asia Business Forum, the establishment of which was recommended at the eighth meeting of the Steering Group for Regional Economic Cooperation, held at Seoul in March 1996. The idea of the Forum is to provide a platform for cooperation among local business promotion organizations. Arrangements are being made to organize a meeting among local business promotion organizations of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and China. The meeting is expected to take a decision on the modality and the terms of reference of the Forum.

114. ESCAP, in collaboration with UNCTAD and UNDP and in association with WTO, organized a meeting of senior officials to assist developing countries of the region in their preparation for the WTO ministerial conference. The agenda of the meeting included a review of the implementation of the agreements of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations and the built-in agenda for further liberalization in such areas as services and agriculture, trade and environment linkages, and examination of trade linkages with investment and competition policy.

3. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

115. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean continued to implement its mandate to collaborate with member States in a comprehensive analysis of development processes, such as public policy-making, monitoring and evaluation, and the provision of resulting operational services of specialized information, technical advice, training and support for regional and international cooperation.

116. In terms of the systematic monitoring of macroeconomic trends in the countries of the region, ECLAC produced the Economic Survey, the Economic Panorama and the Preliminary Overview of the Economy of Latin America and the Caribbean, which, as they are based on comparable information, are the most up-to-date sources of macroeconomic assessment available in the region.

117. The regional framework of statistical information was considerably enlarged and strengthened by the consolidation and smooth operation of the Short-term Indicators Database, the final incorporation of the latest international statistical classifications based on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) for external trade data, the creation of an external debt database for the countries of the region, and the incorporation of new surveys into the Household Survey Data Bank. Of special note in this regard was the Joint OAS/ECLAC Meeting on Statistical Matters (Santiago, 15-18 October 1996), for which ECLAC served as technical secretariat and presented subprogrammes of work in the following areas: (a) adaptation and production of basic statistics in the framework of a regional strategy for the implementation of SNA 1993; (b) environmental statistics and indicators; (c) poverty statistics and indicators; (d) dissemination of statistical information.

118. With regard to trade, activities were aimed at the design of policies and mechanisms to foster the continued expansion and improvement of the commercial linkages of Latin America and the Caribbean with the changing world economy, particularly in view of the current trends towards globalization in production and increasing liberalization of trade and finance. Two computer programs were developed to evaluate the export competitiveness of 83 countries (Competitive Analysis of Nations - CAN) and industrial performance in the region (Industrial Performance Analysis Program). Eleven training courses in the use of the CAN program were held at the request of Governments, business associations and universities.

119. In order to promote the exchange of information on restructuring and industrial policies, the Division of Production, Productivity and Management established a regional network of researchers in this field. Progressive consolidation of this network has already produced a first annotated bibliography, including summaries of 80 studies prepared by researchers. In addition, eight articles in books and international periodicals and eight documents on industrial restructuring and the design of policies to enhance the competitiveness of the countries of the region have been published, and six courses (four at postgraduate level) have been conducted.

120. In the area of food and agriculture, activities have been focused on the promotion of the economic and social integration of small and medium-scale farmers into agro-industry, the impact of free trade agreements, agriculture scenarios towards 2020, technological innovation in agriculture, land markets and clusters on silvo-agriculture resources.

121. In the social development dimension, ECLAC formulated a set of indicators on the situation of families as a follow-up to the activities of the International Year of the Family. The Social Panorama of Latin America provided updated social indicators on families and households in the 1996 edition. Furthermore, the Panorama included a diagnosis and evaluation of programmes to alleviate poverty and an analysis of the main aspects of social integration programmes.

122. The Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE) continued to assist member countries in the implementation and follow-up of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development. To that end, CELADE, among other activities, offered its annual regional intensive course on demographic analysis, provided support to the implementation of the postgraduate course of the UNFPA Global Training Programme on Population and Development, maintained its specialized documentation centre DOCPAL, made population information available on the Internet, published two issues of the Demographic Bulletin, carried out several technical assistance missions, continued to support the incorporation of population variables into national sectorial development programmes, and published several technical documents useful for the implementation of national programmes on population and development. CELADE also began the preparation of background information on reproductive health and poverty, to be examined at the second meeting of ECLAC's sessional committee on population and development, at the twenty-seventh session of ECLAC.

123. A major aspect of the population programme was the convening of a subregional workshop to improve the techniques used in census data analysis. The secretariat continued to offer support in the conduct of surveys on teenage fertility for selected countries. Technical assistance continued to be provided to member countries for the formulation of national population policies and analysis of census data and population projections.

124. ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico continued the analysis of the economic changes experienced by the 10 countries of the subregion. The subregional headquarters also participated intensively in meetings and seminars on economic development, which offered the opportunity to explain and elaborate upon various aspects of the integrated approach and the concept of open regionalism, and thus to disseminate those ECLAC proposals and urge their current relevance as development options for the subregion.

125. ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean convened the Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Eradication (Port-of-Spain, 28 October to 1 November 1996), co-sponsored by 11 regional, international and United Nations agencies. The main output of this meeting was the development of a directional plan of action for poverty eradication in the Caribbean, which identified issues and actions for combating the situation in the region. The plan provides member countries with a comprehensive framework for developing action plans for the eradication of poverty.

126. The ECLAC Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) secretariat continued to update its in-house capacity to respond to the increased demand for information from member countries in its move to the information superhighway. As a result, it is putting into place mechanisms to ensure that new information technology is made available to users through the secretariat's electronic information exchange system and the varied in-house databases. The coverage of the CDCC database continued to be amplified in terms of countries and subject matter, particularly with the establishment of new databases on intra-CDCC trade, social statistics and environmental data.

127. ECLAC continued its operational activities, largely involving technical assistance and training. As part of those efforts, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning gave four international courses, on economic reform and strategic public management; preparation, evaluation and management of local development projects; regional development; and decentralization and local management. Some 134 participants from 14 countries of the region attended the courses.

4. Economic Commission for Africa

128. When the Conference of African Ministers for Economic and Social Development and Planning endorsed the new strategic directions for ECA at the thirty-first annual session of the Commission in May 1996, it requested that the 1997 work programme of the Commission be revised to reflect the new programme orientation so as to ensure a smooth transition to the next medium-term plan, 1998-2001, which it also approved.

129. The revised work programme for 1997, the proposed 1998-1999 programme of work and the next medium-term plan are based on the new programme structure, which has reduced the number of subprogrammes from nine to five. The revised work programme for 1997 consists of three categories of activities: those retained from the 1996-1997 work programme; those reformulated to bring them in line with the new orientation; and new activities designed to respond to new and emerging issues in Africa's development. The major activities undertaken by the Commission in the period under review fall into those categories.

130. A mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the programme of the Second Industrial Development Programme for Africa (IDDA-2) was jointly undertaken during the past six months by ECA, OAU and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) pursuant to resolution I (XII) of the Conference of African Ministers of Industry, adopted at its twelfth meeting, held at Gaborone, Botswana, in May/June 1995. The evaluation involved fielding missions to 21 selected countries in the various subregions in the continent with a view to assessing the implementation of the programme of the Decade. The evaluation covered a number of major development policy issues relevant to the IDDA-2 programme in general and to industrial development in particular.

131. The areas covered in the evaluation included the industrial policies of the countries; the institutional framework set up to translate the above-mentioned policies into operational activities to lend support to the transition from a public-sector dominated economy to a market economy; the privatization of the public-sector enterprises and the new role of the State in industrial development; the promotion of private-sector development and the enabling environment for its growth; the financing of the industrial sector; the development of human resources; and subregional and regional cooperation among African countries. Several major findings emerged from the mid-term evaluation of the programme of the IDDA-2. Practically all countries have embarked upon structural and institutional reforms of their economies in order to create conditions for the development of a market-oriented economy.

132. All countries have integrated fully the central message of IDDA-2 - that industrialization is the most important instrument for economic and social development - into their national development policy and programmes, but each Government would have to adopt its own path to growth and development according to their national endowments. In some countries, however, internal political stability, lack of serious political and economic commitment, and inadequate involvement of the private sector and other economic actors have adversely affected the implementation of the IDDA-2 programme.

133. African Governments attach much importance to promoting the private sector as the major engine of industrial growth. As a result, many countries are implementing policy and institutional reforms for creating an enabling environment for private-sector development. In particular, special attention is being given to improving their physical infrastructures (roads, communications, water, electricity etc.), which are essential for industrial take-off and are also essential to the effectiveness and efficiency of the private sector. Privatization of public-sector enterprises is being pursued with much determination in spite of mixed results and opposition from some stakeholders.

134. The evaluation exercise drew the conclusion that unless there was political commitment to redirecting domestic and external resources to industrialization, much progress could not be expected. Those findings from the mid-term evaluation will be presented at the next meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Industry, to be held at Accra in May 1997.

135. The African Information Society Initiative, an action framework to build information and communication infrastructure in Africa, was approved by the 1996 session of the ECA Conference of Ministers. The Initiative consists of five component areas: policy awareness, development of national information and communication infrastructure strategies and plans, Internet connectivity, training and information content creation. Key activities mounted since mid-1996 have included a policy awareness campaign on the Initiative, organization of policy workshops on connectivity and on the overall use of information and communication technologies for development, organization of Internet training workshops, advisory services on the elaboration of national information and communication plans, and projects on telecentres.

136. Partnership with other organizations has been central to providing the necessary coordination, synergy and resources to undertake the wide scope of activities outlined in the Initiative. At a regional coordinating meeting held at Addis Ababa in October 1996, ECA and several collaborating agencies assumed responsibilities for implementing various components of the Initiative. Partners include UNESCO, ITU, UNDP, FAO, UNIDO, the World Bank and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

137. Regional and non-governmental organizations involved in the Initiative are the Regional Satellite Communications Organization, the Pan African Telecommunication Union, the Telecommunications Foundation for Africa, and the Africa regional branch of the Association for Progressive Communication. The business community has participated through the Global Information Infrastructure Commission.

138. Extrabudgetary resources for implementing the Initiative have come from within the United Nations system (UNDP, ITU, UNESCO), bilateral sources (notably IDRC and the Governments of Denmark and the Netherlands) and the business community (Global Information Infrastructure Commission).

139. Supporting policy measures and actions to foster regional cooperation and integration is a high priority in the ECA programme of work. As a member of the Joint OAU/ECA/ADB secretariat, ECA participated in the preparation of the working documents for the first ministerial session of the African Economic Community (AEC) and the preparatory meeting of its Committee of Experts. Specifically, ECA prepared an issues paper, entitled "Strategy and approach to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community". Along with the OAU secretariat, ECA provided technical back-stopping for those two meetings, in June and November 1996, respectively. ECA also participated in the seventh consultative meeting of the chief executives of OAU, ECA and ADB, during which the three institutions discussed modalities for coordinating activities towards more effective support to the Community.

140. ECA is also the executing agency of a UNDP-funded project aimed at promoting Africa's economic cooperation and integration through the establishment of AEC. The project was launched in November 1996, and the component assigned to ECA on the rationalization of ECA-sponsored institutions is under implementation. The rationalization aims to transform the institutions into specialized agencies of the regional economic communities or new technical capacity-building entities. The implementation of other components of the project, such as the preparation of various protocols to be annexed to the Abuja Treaty and the popularization of the Treaty, is planned to start very soon.

141. ECA, also in cooperation with UNDP, has initiated a programme of assistance in rural and agricultural development in some member States. In Ethiopia, the programme is centred around two projects: the Sustainable Agriculture and Environment Rehabilitation Programme and the Woreda district Agriculture and Rural Integration Development Services Programme. The objectives of the programme are to strengthen the planning and management capacities of the relevant institutions of member States to increase water-harvesting application in dryland areas; increase water conservation in wetland areas; and promote environmental rehabilitation programmes involving soil conservation in arid and semi-arid areas. The programme will soon be extended to Eritrea and other member States of the Commission.

5. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

142. ESCWA activities during 1996 were implemented through data collection, analysis of economic and social conditions, monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of global conferences, and the provision of technical assistance to member States within a regional framework. The link between the analytical and the operational was clearly marked in the implementation of activities in 1996.

143. In the area of economic policies, the secretariat published the annual Survey of Economic and Social Development in the ESCWA Region for 1995. A multidisciplinary activity drawing on contributions from most of the ESCWA substantive divisions, it analysed socio-economic developments in 1995 at both the regional and country levels, and provided a forecast for 1996. In conjunction with the Survey, a preliminary overview of economic developments in the ESCWA region in 1996 was produced for the first time in December 1996 with the goal of providing decision makers in the region and the public at large with an overall assessment of recent developments and a preliminary prediction for 1997 as early as possible. Also within the context of economic policies, the issue of privatization was prominent in a series of ESCWA studies. That included an assessment of privatization experiences in the economies of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other member countries with more diversified economies, as well as a review of the role of financial markets in privatization in the ESCWA region, and an assessment of privatization of the electric power sector in selected ESCWA member countries, with an overview and case studies of Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. Another aspect of economic reform that is gaining prominence is microenterprises, an issue that has been the focus of ESCWA work in recent years. A regional seminar on assessment of the role of business incubators in economic development was organized at Beirut in 1996. ESCWA also

continued to promote entrepreneurship through a series of "Start your own business" training courses in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Gaza, in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In support of another UNIFEM project on strengthening institutions for the development of women's enterprises, ESCWA assisted in the establishment and operation of business counselling units for women entrepreneurs in Jordan and Lebanon.

144. One issue of both immediate and long-term concern to the ESCWA member States is their position in the new global economy, as reflected in their relationship with WTO and their concern with the impact of the Uruguay Round agreements on their economies. The secretariat is advising member States on negotiations for their accession to the Uruguay Round, and is researching the implications of WTO for the economies of the member countries. A multidisciplinary study is being undertaken, entitled "Challenges and opportunities of the new international trade agreement (Uruguay Round): post-Uruguay preparations and adjustments". The study covers activities in four strategic sectors: (a) crude oil, petroleum and petrochemicals, (b) textiles and clothing, (c) agriculture and (d) technology transfer, with special reference to pharmaceutical industries. An innovative study on trade policy aspects of environmental measures in the ESCWA member countries addressed the serious challenges that environmental concerns pose to the expansion of trade, and stressed the need to observe environmental standards.

145. Water resources constitute a crucial issue of high priority to member States. ESCWA has conducted extensive analytical and operational work in that area with a view to furthering the cooperation of member States in the development and management of their water resources. With assistance from the Government of Germany, ESCWA published jointly with the Governments of Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic a study entitled "Investigation of basalt aquifer system shared by Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic". A study on water resources assessment in the ESCWA region, using remote-sensing and geographical information system techniques, was implemented by ESCWA, with financial support from UNEP and the Organization of Islamic Conference, and in cooperation with the Royal Geographic Centre of Jordan. An expert group meeting on water legislation in the ESCWA region, held at Amman in November 1996, was another effort to harmonize water legislation among ESCWA member States and to identify possible mechanisms for the effective enforcement of such legislation. ESCWA staff presented papers at a number of meetings, including the regional workshop on water conservation and reuse (Amman, March 1996); a workshop on the role of industry in the development and rational use of water resources in the ESCWA region (Amman, May 1996); and the Water Management Conference (Abu Dhabi, November 1996).

146. In the area of transport, ESCWA convened an ad hoc expert group meeting on border-crossing formalities and agreements for the transport of goods and passengers at Cairo in November 1996. The meeting addressed the issues of harmonization and standardization of formalities to facilitate and strengthen regional economic cooperation. ESCWA was also called upon by the GCC secretariat to assist in setting up a transport information system covering both land and maritime statistics. At the request of the League of Arab States, ESCWA completed a study based on surveys of existing regulations on permissible

axle and gross loads, and is preparing a study on the technical and administrative requirements for establishing truck weigh stations in the region. Together with the Arab Security Studies and Training Centre, an affiliate of the League of Arab States, it conducted a training workshop on traffic safety and environment (Amman, October 1996).

147. In the area of technology, the secretariat is in the process of completing a comparative study on assessment and promotion of research and development capabilities in ESCWA member countries. The study reviews networks and alliances, and highlights the importance of research and development in key areas, such as information technologies for sustainable development, and evaluates policies and measures designed to enhance the contribution of women scientists and engineers to research and development activities. Two studies on environmentally sound technologies in selected industries were undertaken. The first related to the improvement of technological developments in leather tanning and finishing, and the second addressed the use and perspectives of biotechnology in agriculture in member countries.

148. In the area of statistics and information, the secretariat initiated the formulation of a regional project for an integrated information system that would provide a regional perspective on the state of statistics and statistical offices. The findings would lead to a regional operational programme for harmonizing standards, definitions, and instruments of data collection and processing, as well as providing technical assistance to develop the capacities of statistical bodies. Also in response to the system-wide mandates calling for the development of gender statistics and in cooperation with the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), ESCWA completed the first phase of a gender statistics database that was used to issue a publication on Arab women, entitled Trends, Statistics and Indicators on the Occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Over the coming three years, ESCWA, in collaboration with CAWTAR and with financial support from UNDP, IDRC and UNICEF, will develop national gender statistics programmes in the Arab countries. Moreover, ESCWA is promoting the adoption by member States of the minimum national data set recommended by the United Nations Statistical Commission in response to plans of actions adopted by the United Nations major international conferences. ESCWA continues to publish its widely used Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region, National Accounts Studies and the ESCWA Regional and External Trade Bulletin. In cooperation with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organizations (AIDMO), ESCWA continues to publish the Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries. It also continued to publish a Statistical Newsletter with a view to disseminating information on developments in statistics in the region. Furthermore, to propagate international standards and norms in statistics, ESCWA continues to promote the implementation of the New System of National Accounts (1992 SNA), and conducted a regional training workshop on POPMAP for Windows and Internet (Damascus, October 1996). A newly implemented project on the International Comparison Programme (ICP) in ESCWA countries was undertaken jointly with the World Bank. It included field surveys, as well as a training workshop for statisticians, thus combining the normative, the analytical and the operational.

149. ESCWA also gave special attention to the needs of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including to the opportunities and challenges linked to the peace

initiative. In addition to undertaking a profile of poverty in Gaza and the West Bank, it initiated a study on the situation of Palestinian cities and villages and prospects for development so as to assess the magnitude of the housing problem and needs until the year 2005 and to propose a housing strategy. A study on the impact of the peace process on selected sectors, with an emphasis on industry and trade in financial services, has been initiated. The study aims to examine changes in the industrial sector, especially in labour-intensive industries (textile and garment) and high-tech industries (electronics and related applications).

150. ESCWA was also entrusted by the Secretary-General with special assignments. In May-June 1996, it led a multidisciplinary team of experts from the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat, UNDP, the ILO, FAO, UNICEF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on a special technical mission on the human and material losses and damage resulting from the April 1996 Israeli hostilities in Lebanon, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/22 C.

B. Follow-up activities to recent global conferences

151. Regional commissions are actively involved in the follow-up to United Nations global conferences, both through their specific contributions and through their role as facilitator of regional cooperation in partnership with United Nations and non-United Nations organizations dealing with the issues addressed by those conferences. However, the level of existing resources and the mandate of each regional commission determine the scope of their involvement in follow-up activities.

1. International Conference on Population and Development

(a) Economic Commission for Europe

152. ECE work in the area of population focuses on the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in countries in transition, with the support of UNFPA. Its objectives include assistance to those countries for data collection and processing, analysis and research, and dissemination of policy-relevant information and knowledge in support of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. The work pertains in particular to fertility and reproductive health, population ageing and international migration. ECE is also collaborating with the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Eurostat, the Council of Europe and OECD with the objective of streamlining the collection and disseminating population statistics in the ECE region.

153. Furthermore, as part of the follow-up to ICPD, ECE has participated in the work of the ACC Task Force on Basic Social Services for All. In particular, ECE has represented the regional commissions at the meetings of the Task Force's Working Group on International Migration, and is also representing the regional commissions on the steering committee of the working group preparing the

international technical symposium on international migration, tentatively scheduled for 1998.

(b) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

154. In response to the ICPD recommendation to promote subregional and regional initiatives on population and development, and in recognition of the emphasis of the Bali Declaration on Population and Development, adopted by the Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference, ESCAP, at its fifty-first session, in 1995, welcomed the initiative to establish the Inter-organizational Subcommittee on Population and Development in Asia and the Pacific in order to promote a coherent strategy on population and development. The subcommittee is a subsidiary body of RICAP. The terms of reference of the Subcommittee were approved at its first session in November 1995. At its second session, held in July 1996, it was suggested that the Subcommittee take several steps to strengthen regional cooperation in the population field among the member organizations.

155. At the second session of the Subcommittee, ESCAP proposed to organize a regional meeting in 1997 to review actions taken to implement the Bali Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action. This regional meeting was also recommended by the Committee on Poverty Alleviation through Economic Growth and Social Development at its third session, which was held in October 1996. The Committee further requested the secretariat to seek extrabudgetary resources for that purpose. Accordingly, ESCAP has prepared a proposal for organizing the regional meeting to follow up implementation of the Bali Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action. The proposal has been submitted to UNFPA for possible financial support.

156. In the area of research, ESCAP is implementing several projects on population issues as part of the UNFPA programme cycle (1996-1999) in order to increase awareness of the internationally agreed paradigm shift and new directions in population policy formulation and programme implementation as a result of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action.

157. In terms of operational activities, ESCAP has provided advisory services to member countries of the region in order to support the implementation of the Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development and the ICPD Programme of Action. Several seminars and training workshops were also organized for participants from the member countries as part of project activities.

(c) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

158. ECLAC, through CELADE, undertook several activities in the last year, including participation in the ACC Task Force on Basic Social Services for All and collaboration in the organization of a technical symposium on international migration, as mandated by the Commission on Population and Development. ECLAC continued its assistance to member countries in the implementation and follow-up of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development. To that end, CELADE, among other activities, offered annual regional intensive courses on demographic analysis for development; provided

support to the implementation of graduate courses of the UNFPA Global Training Programme on Population and Development; maintained its specialized documentation centre, DOCPAL; made population information available on the Internet; published two issues of the Demographic Bulletin; carried out several official missions to provide technical assistance to national population programmes; continued to support the incorporation of population variables into national sectoral development programmes; and published several technical documents useful for the implementation of national programmes on population and development. Finally, the Centre started the preparation of background information on reproductive health and poverty, to be examined at the second meeting of ECLAC's Sessional Committee on Population and Development at the twenty-seventh session of ECLAC.

(d) Economic Commission for Africa

159. The Africa Follow-up Committee for the Implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development and the ICPD Programme of Action has adopted a five-year programme of activities (1994-1998) for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of both frameworks. The Committee is serviced by the Joint OAU/ECA/ADB secretariat, which held a workshop of experts on non-governmental organizations to advise member States on the implementation of modalities for achieving the objectives of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action. The workshop was funded by the Governments of France and the Netherlands. Other activities of the joint secretariat have included the preparation of guidelines and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action; the preparation of periodical progress reports, studies and evaluation reports assessing factors and issues contributing to or affecting the implementation of the two frameworks, and country questionnaire on the implementation process; and the organization and servicing of the second meeting of the Follow-up Committee, held at Addis Ababa in March 1997.

(e) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

160. In follow-up of ICPD, the ESCWA secretariat continues to disseminate information through the Population Bulletin of ESCWA, and is currently coordinating activities with the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat to join the Population Network (POPIN). ESCWA is also developing two demographic databases that would facilitate ICPD follow-up action. The first database would harmonize the storage, processing and tabulation system for population data in the countries in the region, and would allow the use of data for the preparation of demographic indicators and population estimates and projections for the region. Acting as executing agency for two UNFPA projects, ESCWA has taken action to finalize the second database on population policies, and is extending support to population councils and committees in the region as part of the follow-up to ICPD. Within the context of the second project, training was provided to member States in the first training workshop on computer software packages for population policies and sustainable development (Amman, April 1996). A training workshop was also held on population policies and sustainable development, health care, education and housing (Amman, September 1996). An expert group meeting on population dynamics and sustainable

development in the Arab world (Amman, October 1996) examined pertinent issues to the above Conference, such as the implications of economic reform and the information system required for monitoring population policies.

2. World Summit for Social Development

(a) Economic Commission for Europe

161. In view of its mandate and resources, ECE contribution to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development is focused on: (a) work on social statistics in cooperation with UNDP; (b) self-employment through the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises; (c) a workshop on poverty among the ageing, organized within the framework of the International Year for Poverty Eradication.

(b) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

162. In follow-up of General Assembly resolution 50/161 and ESCAP resolution 51/4, the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development will be convened at Manila from 5 to 11 November 1997, and will be hosted by the Government of the Philippines. That Conference will review and assess progress towards attaining the goals and targets of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region (regional Social Development Agenda) and the means to enhance regional cooperation in its support. The series of preparatory activities leading up to the Ministerial Conference are expected to be funded by the Asian Development Bank. Focal points have been designated by 28 countries and areas, which are participating actively in national preparations for the Ministerial Conference.

163. Through RICAP, the secretariat is implementing the resolution in close collaboration with concerned United Nations bodies and specialized agencies. The secretariat is also promoting the active participation of non-governmental organizations. A non-governmental organizations workshop on government-non-governmental organizations cooperation for older persons was organized in January 1997 to facilitate and enhance cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for older persons. A non-governmental organizations forum on social development will be convened in early July 1997 in collaboration with interested non-governmental organizations. The results of the forum will be submitted to the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development.

164. Among other follow-up activities, the secretariat has provided assistance through advisory missions and national workshops on the implementation of the regional Social Development Agenda in Fiji, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and Vanuatu over the period October 1996-February 1997, with funding support from the Asian Development Bank.

165. The secretariat has implemented a project entitled "Strengthening national capabilities in implementation of the Social Development Agenda in the ESCAP Region into the twenty-first century", with funding support from the Government

of the Netherlands. Project activities included (a) convening of a regional workshop on guidelines for the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region (Bangkok, March 1996); (b) the preparation and dissemination of "Guidelines for implementing the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP region" (ST/ESCAP/1700) and "Policy and programme perspectives in the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region" (ST/ESCAP/1714).

166. The secretariat also implemented another project on enhancement of social security for the poor, funded by the Government of the Netherlands. Under that project, ESCAP convened an expert group meeting on the enhancement of social security for the poor at Bangkok in November 1995, and issued the publication "Towards social security for the poor in the Asia-Pacific region" (ST/ESCAP/1673).

(c) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

167. In accordance with the mandate of the World Summit for Social Development for the regional commissions, ECLAC convened the First Regional Conference in Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development at Sao Paulo, Brazil, in April 1997. The purpose of the Conference was to review progress in fulfilling the commitments undertaken at the Summit, consider activities carried out in the various countries, give impetus to the regional and subregional cooperation in implementing the commitments, formulate recommendations to the Governments of the region on putting those commitments into practice, and provide a forum for an exchange of information in order to facilitate coordination and mutual support in achieving the region's economic and social development goals. ECLAC submitted for the consideration of Governments a study that focused on three questions. First, it analysed existing conditions of poverty, employment and social integration, the main issues examined at the Summit, from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective. Second, at the policy level, it reported on the developments that had proven most relevant to the fulfilment of the aforementioned commitments. Third, it proposed a few additional guidelines on the content and scope of policies designed to facilitate the full realization of these commitments. The conclusions of the conference are reflected in a final document, entitled "The Sao Paulo consensus".

(d) Economic Commission for Africa

168. As part of the reform of its programme orientation, ECA is placing special emphasis on social policy and poverty analysis, as an integral part of the follow-up to the Summit. ECA will promote dialogue with member States on the equity and growth implications of macroeconomic policies; will investigate the empirical evidence and poverty implications of poverty/gender/ethnicity linkages; make public expenditures pro-poor in Africa; and build capacity for poverty analysis and monitoring. ECA intends to publish a status report on poverty annually, and to convene a conference on anti-poverty policies and programmes in Africa in 1999.

(e) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

169. As mandated by the relevant General Assembly resolutions, ESCWA has integrated into its regular programme of work the follow-up activities to world conferences. In addition, it has completed a draft of the common issues that would constitute a regional programme of action for follow-up of world conferences in line with the United Nations System Consolidated Action Plan (UNSCAP). This plan includes analytical activities, advisory services and technical assistance. It would also be linked with the follow-up action to be undertaken by the League of Arab States.

170. In view of the importance of this issue, a multidisciplinary task force on follow-up of global conferences was established and attached to the office of the Executive Secretary. The task force is responsible for planning and coordinating the formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the programme of action. In addition, the theme of the first meeting of the ESCWA Committee on Social Development (Amman, 25 and 26 March 1997) is follow-up of global conferences.

171. ESCWA has been entrusted by the Regional Inter-agency Coordination Group with preparing the above proposal as a flagship project for UNDP support. ESCWA is also in the process of completing a similar project with the League of Arab States. Both projects will be closely linked, and will contribute to building a consensus on a limited number of priority areas that lend themselves to regional cooperation among the member States, and to cooperative arrangements with the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the donor community.

172. The activities undertaken by the secretariat deal with some priority areas that are relevant to all recent global conferences. Although the World Summit for Social Development focused on poverty, poverty was also a core concern of the other world conferences. During the implementation of the 1994-1995 programme of work, poverty-related activities of ESCWA dealt with the measurement and characteristics of the poor in Western Asia. In 1996, poverty-related activities focused on case studies that would provide valuable inputs into the regional perspective on poverty eradication. In cooperation with ILO, ESCWA completed a profile of poverty in Lebanon (published in Arabic) that examined poverty-related policies dealing with health, education, employment and fiscal policy. The information provided in the study had a strong impact on the Government of Lebanon, which requested ESCWA assistance in formulating a national strategy for social development. Similar profiles covered Iraq, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With support from UNDP, ESCWA, acting as the executing agency for a regional project on the promotion of human development among member States, established national networks in and provided assistance to, a number of countries to initiate preparation of country submissions to the Human Development Report.

173. In response to the mandate to convene high-level biennial meetings as follow-up to the Summit, ESCWA has introduced in its 1998-1999 programme of work a series of expert group meetings dealing with areas of concern of the Summit. In addition, the Committee on Social Development will review progress achieved in follow-up action to the recommendations of the Summit. The outputs of those expert and intergovernmental meetings will be integrated into a programme of

action that will be reviewed and adopted by a high-level regional meeting, scheduled in late 1999.

3. Fourth World Conference on Women

(a) Economic Commission for Europe

174. In line with the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Conference, the Commission called on its principal subsidiary bodies to take into account the mainstreaming of a gender perspective, where appropriate, when defining and implementing their work programmes. Such mainstreaming has already been considered by the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Trade Committee, the Committee on Human Settlements and the Timber Committee, as well as for programmes in the fields of statistics and population. Furthermore, ECE has been associated with the Division for the Advancement for Women of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP for the Subregional Conference on the Implementation of the Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe, organized by the Government of Romania at Bucharest in September 1996. Its substantive contribution focused on the strengthening of national mechanisms for the advancement of women, which is one of the strategic objectives contained in the Platform for Action.

(b) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

175. At the fifty-second session of ESCAP, in April 1996, resolution 52/3 entitled "Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women" was adopted. In that resolution, ESCAP urged all members and associate members to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in coordination with the implementation of the Jakarta Declaration and Plan for Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific.

176. In the Asian and Pacific region, many countries have developed national plans of action or adapted existing plans to implement the Platform for Action. ESCAP has been involved with countries in the development of those national plans as well as plans on specific critical areas of concern identified in the Platform. ESCAP is monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action through data obtained from a regional questionnaire, survey and other supplementary information.

177. Action is being taken to mainstream women's issues and gender perspectives into the Commission's programme of work through an interdivisional mechanism to promote mainstreaming and integrating priorities of the Platform for Action into the work programme of ESCAP. At the regional level, ESCAP is the convener of the RICAP Inter-Agency Subcommittee on the Advancement of Women, which provides the institutional framework for joint and collaborative activities based on the Jakarta Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001. Collaboration partners are intergovernmental organizations, such as the South Pacific Commission, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, ASEAN and SAARC, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions, and development banks, especially the Asian Development Bank. Deliberations of the Subcommittee

have been forwarded to the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

178. With the growing feminization of poverty and recognition of the key role played by women in contributing to economic growth and poverty alleviation, programmes have been oriented towards the empowerment of women through increased gender equality in access to productive resources and social services to generate growth with equity, within the context of a changing macroeconomic environment and the impact of globalization.

179. Advocacy and publicity activities that have been undertaken include disseminating materials on the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the production of a videotape on critical areas of concern, production of a brochure on the regional plan of action and guidelines for its implementation, providing catalytic funds to non-governmental organizations to prepare information kits for women at the grass-roots level, sponsoring national workshops to discuss implementation of the Platform for Action, and assisting in the establishment of national information centres and information exchange networks. A directory of women's organizations in Central Asia has been published in collaboration with UNDP.

(c) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

180. In follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, ECLAC has been contributing to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the fulfilment of the mandates of the sixth session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Programme of Action for Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001. This has been done primarily by reinforcing the activities of the presiding officers of the Regional Conference. The presiding officers met at Port of Spain on 18 and 19 November 1996, at which meeting ECLAC reviewed the activities carried out, particularly the support provided to the priority-setting exercise carried out by the Working Group established by ECLAC resolution 553 (XXVI), in which ECLAC aimed to mainstream gender issues in the work programme 1998-1999. The presiding officers agreed that the seventh session of the Regional Conference will take place at ECLAC headquarters at Santiago from 19 to 21 November 1997, with the main objective of speeding up progress in the implementation of the Regional Programme of Action.

(d) Economic Commission for Africa

181. In the implementation of both the Beijing Platform for Action and the regional platform, ECA conceives and perceives its roles as threefold: as advocate, promoting the mainstreaming of women in the development activities of member States; as catalyst, monitoring and reporting on the implementation by member States of globally and regionally agreed plans and strategies for the advancement of women; and as facilitator, assisting member States to implement policy measures and actions for advancement of women.

182. To strengthen its capacity to play those three roles, ECA has launched the Leadership Fund for African Women, with a target of US$ 10 million, of which $1 million has already been secured. The Leadership Fund will operate as an

integral part of the ECA African Centre for Women. The Leadership Fund will be used to support the activities of member States in four priority areas: enhancing women's leadership role in public decision-making; promoting the socio-economic empowerment of women; promoting women's human and legal rights, and implementing the global and African platforms for action. Preliminary surveys and studies have been initiated in the first three areas in order to define training and other needs for which specific programmes would be developed.

183. The programme and organizational reforms at ECA have redirected resources to strengthen its activities for the advancement of women. The number of professional staff at the African Centre for Women - the ECA organizational entity devoted to advancement of women - has been doubled. Gender specialists have been redeployed to the ECA subregional development centres in addition to technical advisory services to be provided by regional advisers on various aspects of gender to member States. Gender mainstreaming is a key feature of the Commission's work programme in the 1997 revised work programme. This has been achieved by ensuring active involvement of gender specialists in the development of the work programme of the various divisions of the Commission. At a later stage, training programmes on gender analysis, planning and implementation will be designed to increase gender responsiveness in the programmes of the Commission.

(e) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

184. With regard to the follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women, ESCWA updated the Review of Assessment of Progress Achieved in the Advancement of Arab Women in the Light of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, including all the information in the country reports and on national plans of action prepared for the Conference. That activity covered Arab countries in Western Asia and North Africa, and was jointly undertaken with CAWTAR. In line with the recommendations of the Conference, ESCWA compiled gender-specific data to facilitate the monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the regional level. In addition, a database on policies related to the advancement of Arab women was set up, covering Jordan and Lebanon as a first step. That database will complement the database on population policies, and will facilitate the monitoring of changes in gender-related policies.

185. At the request of the League of Arab States, ESCWA also provided substantive support and conference services to the meeting of Arab ministers of social affairs on the theme "One year after Beijing", hosted by the Government of Jordan at Amman in September 1996. The meeting considered three core areas: women and poverty (the economic dimension); women in decision-making (the political dimension); and the Arab family (the social dimension). In a resolution adopted on the subject, the Ministers of Social Affairs requested the League of Arab States to cooperate with ESCWA, in consultation with the other agencies, to prepare a programme for follow-up action. ESCWA will continue to perform its task as the substantive regional organization responsible for follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. Although ESCWA carries the main responsibility for substantive preparation, it will cooperate with the League of Arab States in finalizing substantive positions that can be adopted by all the members of the League of Arab States, which include ESCWA member States.

It will also undertake joint activities for follow-up purposes, with ESCWA covering its member States and the League of Arab States covering the Arab States in Africa. Mobilization and sharing of resources in undertaking those tasks is also expected to be part of the cooperative relationship.

4. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

(a) Economic Commission for Europe

186. Immediately after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Committee on Environmental Policy provided general policy guidance on the promotion of the follow-up to Agenda 21 at the regional level, and undertook a number of specific activities based on the 1994 ECE Plan of Action to Implement Agenda 21. Following the third ministerial conference on the theme "Environment for Europe" at Sofia, in 1995, the Committee considered thoroughly its further strategic role in regional environmental policy-making, and fully revised its programme of work for 1996-1998, basing it on three pillars: (a) participation in the two interrelated major international cooperative processes: the "Environment for Europe" process and the regional promotion of Agenda 21; (b) the development and carrying-out of environmental performance reviews; and (c) the development and implementation of regional environmental conventions and protocols that are focused on transboundary issues, an important dimension of Agenda 21. Several activities are being undertaken to carry out the agreed work programme, as described above (see paras. 81-100). The Government of Belarus, with the assistance of the ECE secretariat, organized the International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition in April 1997. All activities included in the Committee's present work programme will further promote the regional implementation of Agenda 21, which constitutes a useful political umbrella and provides impetus for the work under way or to be initiated.

187. In 1996 and at the beginning of 1997, the Committee also considered, provisionally, its possible future role in reviewing and reporting on region-wide progress in the implementation of Agenda 21, pending the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21 in June 1997. It noted with interest that the need to strengthen the regional contribution to the follow-up in the future had been recognized by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

(b) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

188. The single most significant event among efforts towards the implementation of Agenda 21 of UNCED in the region was the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, held in 1995 and organized by ESCAP and co-sponsored by UNDP, UNEP and ADB. The Conference stressed the need to strengthen regional cooperation in order to address issues of regional concerns. Cooperative agreements to exchange information on experience, technology transfer and capacity-building were recommended. The important role of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the media and other major groups in ensuring the implementation of the outcome of the Conference and

Agenda 21 was acknowledged, and their active involvement was recommended. The Conference adopted a ministerial declaration and a regional action programme on environmentally sound and sustainable development, 1996-2000. A number of associated events were also held, including a non-governmental organizations/ media symposium on environment and development, a private sector forum on the theme: "Sustainable development forum Asia-Pacific 1995" and an event entitled "CLEANTECH '95".

189. As a follow-up to the Conference, cooperation between ESCAP and the established environmental subregional programmes, such as SAARC, the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP), the South Asian Cooperative Environmental Programme (SACEP) and ASEAN, have been strengthened. Subregional cooperation in North-East Asia has also been invigorated with the adoption of the Framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation at the third meeting of senior officials of the subregion, held at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in September 1996. The countries involved are: China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and Russian Federation.

190. Most of the countries of the region, often with assistance from ESCAP, have translated the Agenda 21 principles into their national context, according to political, economic, ecological and cultural realities, as well as national objectives. For example, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Islamic Republic of Iran have adopted their own national Agenda 21. Others countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal and Pakistan, have incorporated Agenda 21 into their national long-term development plans. Since UNCED, many small island developing States in the Pacific have reoriented their policies and programmes to make sustainable development one of their national goals.

191. Jointly with ADB, ESCAP is executing a project for capacity-building through exchange of experiences among the countries of North-East Asia on the operation and maintenance of coal-fired plants with a view to demonstrating the best practices and discussion on measures for pollution emission reduction in the older power plants. The project focuses on intercountry comparability of relevant national data on standardization and monitoring methods and data comparability. With support from ADB, a country study for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is being realized for the identification of least cost greenhouse gas mitigation measures.

192. ESCAP has also issued a number of publications on regional issues, including the 1995 Report on the State of the Environment, as well as general guidelines on environmental management of hazardous waste, sustainable tourism, water resource management, environmental reporting and coastal environmental management. The regional networks established for desertification control, climate change and environmental reporting, and the Inter-Agency Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific have made substantive contributions.

193. The Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted at the Global Conference on that topic in May 1994, is being pursued by ESCAP, in cooperation with SPREP. Some 14 small island

developing States of the region have completed national environmental management strategies or an equivalent planning process. In addition, Fiji and Maldives have developed comprehensive legislation.

194. Major initiatives by ESCAP in recent years to assist in the implementation of national environment management strategies and to promote sustainable development in the Pacific subregion have included technical assistance, advisory services, research studies, training and information dissemination. Over 100 advisory missions were undertaken to Pacific island countries on sustainable development policy formulation and implementation. Case studies on the incorporation of sustainable development considerations into economic decision-making were undertaken in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The training courses, seminars and workshops included trade and investment, tourism, statistics, remote sensing and geographical information systems. The third session of the special body on Pacific island developing countries, held in April 1995, considered issues related to the Programme of Action. Similarly, the fourth session, held in April 1997, discussed issues on trade and investment (implications of recent issues) and the coordination of development policy management, which is also related to the Programme of Action.

195. As mandated by the Global Conference, short-term extrabudgetary resources were mobilized to assist the ESCAP Pacific Operation Centre for its work on sustainable development, which included setting up an effective mechanism to perform the monitoring role. The support unit is composed of two cells, one at SPREP at Apia, Samoa, mostly dealing with environmental aspects, and the other at ESCAP in Port Vila, Vanuatu, specifically identified to provide support on socio-economic issues. The main purpose of the support unit would be to maintain a database and other information that would be useful for the coordinating activities of all concerned. The unit is receiving guidance from the advisory body set up for that purpose on the recommendation of the South Pacific Forum.

(c) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

196. As part of the follow-up to Agenda 21, the ECLAC/German Agency for Technical Cooperation project entitled "Guidelines and consultancy services on controlled environmentally sound waste management" continued to assist in the formulation of policies for integrated waste management, with special emphasis on the institutional and legal framework, technological policy and urban planning. The fourth regional seminar on progress and prospects for environmentally sound management of urban and industrial waste was held at Santiago in September 1996. ECLAC also prepared a document entitled "Progress achieved by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the implementation of the recommendations made in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on integrated water resources management" (LC/G.1917). It also contributed to the formulation of water legislation, integrated watershed management and privatization of utilities, responding to requests from member Governments for technical assistance and training. That assistance has been extended to some countries in other regions, such as Yemen, Namibia and Cambodia. ECLAC also co-sponsored, with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and IDB, the fourth expert meeting on financial issues of Agenda 21, held at ECLAC headquarters at Santiago in January 1996. It continued to undertake activities

in the area of geothermal energy, and entered into an agreement with the European Community to foster its development.

197. ECLAC, through its subregional headquarters for the Caribbean, has also been cooperating actively in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Together with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a meeting of Caribbean government experts was held at Port of Spain in November 1994 to analyse the progress made and obstacles to be overcome in carrying out the recommendations of the Global Conference in the Caribbean. That meeting found that little progress had been made, recommended that ECLAC and CARICOM establish a joint coordinating unit to coordinate the implementation of the Programme of Action in the region, and assigned a number of political and substantive responsibilities to ECLAC and CARICOM. During the past months, ECLAC has developed a comprehensive database of projects and activities relevant to small island developing States being carried out by bilateral, multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations in the Caribbean, which is available on the Internet (ECLAC Port of Spain). Together with CARICOM and the other international organizations working in the field, ECLAC is convening a ministerial meeting on the implementation of the Programme of Action, to be held in Barbados in September 1997. In preparation for that meeting, two inter-agency meetings have been held with CARICOM, the Caribbean Development Bank, UNDP, IDB, UNEP, UNESCO and other co-sponsoring agencies. The subregional headquarters, together with the Caribbean Development Bank and UNDP, is presently organizing a series of national consultations to be held in selected Caribbean countries. ECLAC is also preparing a comprehensive report on the status of implementation of the Programme of Action in the region. It is anticipated that ECLAC and other co-sponsoring agencies will present papers on related substantive issues to the upcoming ministerial meeting.

(d) Economic Commission for Africa

198. The Conference of Ministers of ECA adopted in 1993 the African Strategies for the Implementation of Agenda 21 in Africa, advocating and promoting the development/strengthening of various capacities at the national, subregional and regional levels in seven priority areas of Agenda 21. At the request of member States, ECA embarked on an in-depth and comprehensive study entitled "A framework agenda for building and utilizing critical capacities in Africa", which contains a chapter focusing on the capacities needed for sustainable environment management.

199. As part of its programme reform, ECA has created a subprogramme that combines the issues of food and agriculture, population, environment, water resources, human settlements, and science and technology. The new arrangement will reinforce the Commission's multidisciplinary approach to addressing those issues for member States.

200. ECA has contributed to the implementation of various conventions, regional programmes and issues of transboundary nature. In particular, within the context of the programme adopted by the African Conference of Ministers of Environment, collaborative activities between ECA and other agencies have been undertaken to assist member States. As a result, many member States have

signed, ratified and/or acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity, while action plans for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Desertification and/or Drought, particularly in Africa, have been or are being completed at the national, subregional and regional levels.

201. ECA is collaborating with other regional organizations and with the secretariat of the Convention to support the preparatory process for African countries for the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, to be held in June 1997.

(e) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

202. In the area of environment, ESCWA monitored regional developments in the implementation of Agenda 21, and made several contributions to various environment-related bodies, including the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region, which is a Committee of the League of Arab States with ESCWA membership.

5. United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

(a) Economic Commission for Europe

203. The importance of Habitat II was emphasized at the fifty-seventh session of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements (September 1996), at which the Committee devoted a significant part of the session to the outcome of the Conference, particularly those items that were of special interest to the regional commissions. Members of the Committee confirmed its current priorities, sustainable human settlements development and assistance to countries in transition as important regional issues, especially in the Habitat II follow-up.

204. In accordance with the final recommendations of Habitat II, the Committee noted the importance of monitoring the implementation of human settlements policies and developing partnerships with local authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The Committee decided to establish an advisory board, with the participation of representatives of local authorities, the private sector, governmental and non-governmental organizations and research institutes. The Committee strongly supported the continuation of cooperation of follow-up activities, in particular with other regional commissions.

205. As follow-up to the Habitat Agenda and its implementation, ECE has proposed: (a) to develop regional plans of action and strategies addressing priority issues specific to the regional context; (b) to review progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in the regional plans of action, including those related to capacity-building information, provision of financial resources and technical cooperation; and (c) to assist the Commission on Human Settlements in the evaluation of regional responses to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

(b) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

206. The main activities that ESCAP will undertake as follow-up to Habitat II are: (a) convening the second ministerial conference on urbanization in Asia and the Pacific; (b) revision of the regional action plan on urbanization; and (c) promotion and support of urban forums.

207. The first ministerial conference on urbanization in Asia and the Pacific, convened in November 1993 at Bangkok, had provided a unique opportunity for a dialogue between different urban actors since participants included representatives of national Governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, research and training institutes, and the media. That multisectoral dialogue was called the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. The most important output of that conference was the endorsement of the regional action plan on urbanization. The plan was later adopted by the Commission at its fiftieth session as a blueprint for urban development and management in the region. The second meeting of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum took place in early 1996, and its main output was a report entitled "Living in Asian cities" (ST/ESCAP/1660). The publication was the region's input to Habitat II.

208. The third meeting of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum will take place simultaneously with the second ministerial conference on urbanization, to be held at Bangkok in late 1998. Inter alia, the Conference will provide an opportunity to evaluate the progress achieved in implementing the Habitat Agenda and the regional action plan. The Conference will also revise the regional action plan so as to bring its objectives in line with those of the Habitat Agenda adopted at Istanbul. ESCAP will continue to promote and support the establishment of urban forums at the local and national levels as mechanisms to facilitate broad participation by a variety of actors in the process of urban development and management.

(c) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

209. ECLAC acted as technical secretariat to the fifth regional meeting of ministers and high-level authorities of the housing and urban development sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, held at Kingston, Jamaica, from 12 to 15 November 1996. The main result of that meeting, the first regional follow-up activity to Habitat II, was the prioritization of the most important elements of each of the five thematic areas of the regional plan of action on human settlements 1996-2000.

(d) Economic Commission for Africa

210. ECA has prepared a regional plan of action for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda adopted at Istanbul. The plan has been sent to member States for review, and the outcome of the review will provide the basis for ECA work on monitoring priority issues in the Habitat Agenda. ECA will strengthen regional networks in the field of human settlements, stimulate exchange of experiences and information, provide advisory services, organize regional training seminars and workshops, and maintain close relations with the various entities of the United Nations system through regional cluster meetings of resident representatives/resident coordinators. It will also continue its cooperation

with all outside actors, such as regional groupings, Governments and regional associations of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academics, and others in addressing priority issues specific to the African context.

(e) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

211. As a follow-up to Habitat II, ESCWA examined the action to be taken within its mandate. The Social Development Issues and Policies Division established a database on human settlements policies, with an emphasis on housing and urbanization. The database complements those on population policies and gender issues. ESCWA also continued to cooperate with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in issuing the News Bulletin on Human Settlements in the Arab World. Attention was also given to Bedouin communities, a population group with special needs that are often neglected. In cooperation with the United Arab Emirates University at Al-Ain, ESCWA held a regional symposium on environmentally sustainable settlements development in desert regions in October 1996. That topic is taking on increasing significance in the light of the intention of the Gulf countries to adopt policy decisions that would preserve the cultural components of Bedouin societies.

C. Interregional cooperation: activities of interest to more than one commission

212. Projects and programmes implemented by one commission can often be of interest and relevance to countries in another region. Although the regional commissions frequently interact among themselves at the level of the executive secretaries and at programme managers level to learn from each others' experience, in other instances they have forged effective cooperation links on specific issues, projects or programmes of mutual interest between two or more commissions.

213. Ever since the Central Asian Republics of the former USSR gained dual membership in ECE and ESCAP, both commissions have made endeavours to coordinate their activities, including the advisory services rendered by them under section 20 of the programme budget of technical cooperation. ECE and ESCAP have initiated a special programme for the economies of Central Asia, aimed at maximizing the benefits that the subregion can obtain from the expertise of the two commissions. Furthermore, ECE training materials on United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT), including an electronic book, have been developed in a joint project with ESCAP to be used for developing and transition economies.

214. That informal arrangement received an impetus for more concrete treatment when an initiative of the President of Kazakstan was proposed at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly for the establishment by ESCAP and ECE of a joint commission for Central Asia. At the invitation of the Government of Kazakstan, a joint ECE/ESCAP mission visited Almaty in December 1996. The summary and conclusions of the joint mission are: (a) the Kazakstan initiative to establish a joint ECE/ESCAP special programme for the countries of Central Asia aims to accelerate their transition and integrate them into the economies

of Europe and Asia, taking full advantage of their strategic geographic situation; (b) the UNDP country office supports the idea of a joint ECE/ESCAP special programme for Central Asia, and will cooperate with the regional commissions in programming and implementation; (c) the mission gathered basic information that has been used in the preparation of an outline for the joint special programme, focusing on the priority areas of attention of the subregion of Central Asia. In addition, as a first concrete step towards joint/collaborative action by the two commissions in Central Asia, it was decided that after Kazakstan formally conveys its agreement to host the Asia Pacific Trade Fair in 1998, ECE and ESCAP will be jointly involved in promoting the Fair.

215. The regional commissions can also facilitate the dissemination, outside a particular region, of conventions, norms and standards. In the case of ECE, 24 agreements and conventions in the field of transport have been extended to countries outside that region, and some of those agreements are now global, as is the case for the transport of dangerous goods. UN/EDIFACT is becoming worldwide, and some legal instruments in the field of environment are taken as a basis for global agreements or as models to be adapted to the needs of other regions. For instance, the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution is now being considered by ESCAP with a view to taking up some of its elements and adapting them to the Asian context.

216. Among other areas of mutual interest, ESCAP regularly receives the entire ECE Internet World Wide Web site on trade facilitation, which it incorporates into its own Internet site. Cooperation between ECE and ECA continued on the Straits of Gibraltar. New areas of cooperation among regional commissions continue to be explored, keeping in view the areas of their respective comparative advantages and expertise.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 16 (E/1997/36).

[2] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1987, Supplement No. 14 (E/1987/34), chap. IV, resolution 262 (XLIII).

[3] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1992, Supplement No. 11 (E/1992/31), chap. IV, resolution 48/2.

[4] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 18 (E/1997/38).

[5] All elements were placed in one of four categories: "A", which, in the collective judgment of member Governments, represented the 10 per cent of activities justifying the highest priority; "C" and "D", which represented the 15 per cent considered the lowest priority; and "B", the remaining 75 per cent.

[6] ECLAC, "1996-1997 programme budget adjustment plan", July 1996.

[7] Exchange of letters between the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, dated 1 October and 19 December 1996, respectively.

[8] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 15 (E/1996/35), chap. IV, resolution 809 (XXXI).

[9] The ESCWA Statistical Committee, established by resolution 179 (XVI) of 2 September 1992; the Committee on Social Development, established by resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994; the Committee on Energy, established by resolution 204 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995; and the Committee on Water Resources, established by resolution 205 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995. With the exception of the Statistical Committee, which met in 1995 and 1997, and other three committees will meet for the first time in 1997.

[10] The following participate in the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, International Telecommunication Union, UNDP, UNEP, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNFPA, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, UNIFEM, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, World Food Programme and World Health Organization.

Annex

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Economic and Social Council resolution 1817 (LV), the executive secretaries of the five regional commissions met in New York on 31 July 1996 and 15 November 1996, in conjunction with the substantive session of the Council and the senior officials meeting, respectively. At those two meetings, the executive secretaries, in addition to reviewing the substance and modalities of cooperation, as well as the arrangements among the commissions and with relevant bodies and programmes, had an extensive exchange of views on the reform and restructuring of their respective organizations in the broader context of the reform of the United Nations.

2. They noted that although regionalism may weaken multilateralism by contributing to the fragmentation of the world economy into separate blocs, it can also be a powerful bulwark against marginalization and a bridge towards a harmonious multilateral system. As the Commission on Global Governance recognized in its report, to make better use of the actual and potential force of regionalism while avoiding the possible dangers, a system of global governance must encourage, as well as accommodate in its institutional structure, expressions of regionalism that are compatible with the purpose and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.* The challenge is to use both global and regional arrangements in a mutually supportive way.

3. Like any institution, the regional commissions have to adapt to changing needs and to reaffirm their relevance to their stakeholders. They can foster regional cooperation by contributing further on the basis of their comparative advantages: by strengthening their multidisciplinary approach to issues of regional development; by adapting their programmes to the evolving needs of their respective regions; by revitalizing their role in promoting regional initiatives and strategies, including initiatives that could not be pursued at the global level; by enhancing the use of their forums for policy dialogue at the regional and subregional levels; and by providing research studies, training activities, advisory services in a cost-effective manner. The regional commissions also remain uniquely suited to raising issues of regional interest in global forums and global issues in regional forums. The executive secretaries emphasized that those considerations have been uppermost in the recent efforts of reform and restructuring of the commissions. Their motivation has been nothing less than remaining relevant to the changing needs and circumstances of their respective memberships.

4. They also noted that an interlinked aspect of their role as provider of services to their member States is the question whether the regional commissions should engage in both normative and operational activities: the fact is, they do. They are also able to complement catalytic technical cooperation activities funded from the regular United Nations programme of technical cooperation with the operational activities funded by extrabudgetary contributions from member countries, including the developing countries, and from the multilateral funding institutions, including development banks.

5. Indeed, the normative and operational activities of the regional commissions are mutually reinforcing. For example, the regional commissions' best researchers are called upon to provide technical assistance, and in providing technical assistance, they obtain insights that improve the quality of their research. It is difficult to separate their analytical work from hands-on services provided to their Governments. In view of the multisectoral approach of the commissions, coupled with their thorough knowledge of their respective regions, successful projects in one country can be explained to others. Moreover, providing technical assistance and maintaining contacts with governmental authorities from the regional level are simply easier and less expensive.

6. Their linkage with the country framework strategies, however, remains a weak aspect of their operational role. An absence of institutional linkages to date militates against optimal utilization of the capacities and full potentials of the regional commissions in providing services to their membership, both for regional activities and for back-stopping activities at the national level. In this regard, consideration also could be given to establishing linkages with the existing consultative coordination mechanisms established by the regional commissions for improved cooperation with the regional offices of the United Nations programmes and agencies. It is opportune that these are among the issues under consideration by the General Assembly, which in paragraph 20 of its resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with member States and United Nations organizations, to consider ways of enhancing the coordination of United Nations development activities at the regional and subregional levels, including ways of enhancing the role of regional commissions and of promoting the national ownership of regional programmes.

7. The executive secretaries welcomed the call by the Council concerning the need for institutionalizing a more structural relationship between the Council and the regional commissions, not merely because of the rather limited opportunities currently available for substantive interactions but also because of the mandate and authority of the Council itself which, inter alia, requires the Council to: (a) harmonize policy perspectives between globalism and regionalism; and (b) oversee the implementation and follow-up of the global conferences, including at the regional level, in an integrated setting.

8. In the view of the executive secretaries, better flow of relevant information and improved policy dialogue are essential for improvement in the structural relationship between the regional commissions and the Council. The orientation of future regional cooperation reports could be more focused on analysis of the results of research and operational activities of the commissions in selected priority areas. The commissions could also report on activities relevant to the theme topics considered by the Council's various high-level segments. This would not only improve the substantive interactions between the Council and the regional commissions, by making the latters' inputs more relevant to the agenda of the Council, but would also give real meaning to the Council's ongoing task of harmonizing regional and international cooperation.

9. Similarly, an improved structural relationship in future could also involve more interface between the subsidiary bodies of the regional commissions and the functional commissions, inter alia, through the provision of inputs on items of mutual concern and the participation of the bureaux of relevant regional committees in meetings of the functional commissions, as appropriate. Inter-sessional consultations between the respective bureaux through electronic mail could also be encouraged.

10. The new orientation of the Secretary-General's report should also result in a more effective review by the Council of the yearly topic for interregional cooperation. In the past, the Council has sought to encourage such cooperation, and has even sponsored project ideas in some of its resolutions. The non-availability of extrabudgetary resources, however, has always hindered the implementation of such projects. Of late, the regional commissions have been seeking to cooperate among themselves more directly, based on their relevant experiences and capacities. The demand drive in utilizing and learning from each other's recognized experiences could also be a criteria for the choice of a topic for interregional cooperation to be considered by the Council, even if this could, at times, limit the number of the commissions involved.

Notes

[a] See Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance (Oxford University Press, 1995).